DELPHINE.

BY

MADAME DE STAEL-HOLSTEIN.

Un Homme doit savoir braver l'Opinion ! une Femme s'y soumettre.

A Man ought to be able to brave public Opinion ; a Woman should submit to it. *Madame Neckar's Miscellanies.*

IN SIX VOLUMES.

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DELPHINE.

LETTER I.

MADLLE D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, July 20, 1790.

AFTER the receipt of your letter, I passed the whole day in tears, and my eyes are so wearied with weeping, that I can now scarcely see well enough to write to you. My dear child, to what troubles have you not been exposed! Alas! why was not I with you, why was not I enabled to express my hatred for the wicked, and to administer consolation to goodness in distress? I had conceived an esteem for Leonce; I looked upon him as your intended husband, and as a friend worthy of

of your attachment; yet he has been capable of such cruelty; he has voluntarily renounced the most amiable woman in the world, because he had room to reproach her with an error, of which the noblest virtues were the cause, and which even angels would commit, were they to witness the weaknesses and sufferings incident to human nature. It may be supposed, that Madame de Vernon did not exert herself to defend your conduct: to speak more plainly, I am inclined to suspect her of having aggravated a circumstance, which it was her duty to justify; but this forms no reasonable apology for the conduct of Leonce. Was it requisite for him, whom you have condescended to prefer before all others, to be guided by an indifferent person, in his opinion of your merit? No,—he never loved you—you must forget him for ever, and fortify your soul with the conscious sentiment of your own worth. Life, my dear Delphine, is never over at the age of twenty; at that

early

early period, nature comes seasonably to the relief of misfortunes, the moral faculries are still improving, and it is only in the decline of our days, that troubles insurmountable and insupportable will overwhelm us.

Let me presume to advise you, on this occasion—quit the busy world for a short time, and come to live with me: I have but an indistinct idea of this world; but I am persuaded, that all the good qualities of the heart and understanding are not of themselves sufficient to secure us a peaceful life. To keep well with the world, a certain science is requisite, which, indeed, is not altogether criminal; but which, however, presupposes a too early insight into vice, and a certain degree of that distrust, which the conduct of mankind must reasonably inspire. Your understanding is most comprehensive; but your heart is too young, and too susceptible of tender impressions; you ought, therefore, to shelter your sensibility under

the shade of solitude; and, having acquired fresh strength in your retirement, to return once more to the commerce of the world. If you still continue to be attached to it, the evils you have experienced will become for ever incurable.

Come and enjoy the unruffled calm of retirement, tranquillize yourself by the absence of disagreeable objects, and the momentary suspension of every new emotion. A picture like this is void of gaudy colouring; but, in course of time, a sameness of situation produces its benefit; and if the consolations it makes us derive from ourselves alone, are not rapid in succession, they have at least the merit of being durable in their effects.

I do not now speak to you of my own affection; it is with diffidence I mention it, when the pangs of love are the subject; however, on some occasions, I hope your tender heart may still find relief and repose in my attachment.

LETTER

LETTER II.

DELPHINE IN ANSWER TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, July 26, 1790.

YES—I am determined to rejoin you, and that for ever; but still, how can you say, that he never loved me? I know well, that I have no prospect in the future; but why deprive me of the pleasures of the past?

From his deportment at the concert, at the ball, and the last time I saw him, I am convinced that he loved me. These tender recollections have been constantly present to my mind, these twelve days past; his words, his looks, his accents, on which I hung with unabated ardour, and which gave me every assurance of his affection: he loved, and I was not engaged, and he is now the husband of another. This

This is the sum of my misery; the cruel circle which my sorrows trace around me, and which bitter recollections will never suffer me to pass. Since that fatal day, on which I ought to have expired, I have seen nobody but Theresa; I have not answered the letters of Madame de Vernon, and I sent her word that I could not see her; even you yourself could not have given me relief.

I fancy that I shall be able to regain my empire over myself; but as for happiness, your reason will tell you, that it is no longer to be my portion. You do not imagine that I can ever love any man but Leonce; you do not imagine, that I can ever forget that resistless charm, which for the first time in my life inspired me with the tender passion. Strange! that the fate of a woman should be determined, when she has not married the object of her affections: the world leaves only one hope in the destiny of the sex, and when their lot is drawn, and disappointment

ensues,

ensues, the matter is finally and irrecoverably settled. All further efforts are ineffectual, and even attended with a degradation of character; when indulging the fond hope of retrieving an irreparable injury, they engage in a vain struggle with their destiny, which only keeps in restless agitation the precious moments of youth, and deprives declining years of the recollection of virtuous actions—the only glory of old age, and of the tomb. What then is to be done, when some cause, either unknown to us, or even reasonably founded, deprives us of the greatest of all blessings—that is, of a marriage of love? What is to be done, when we are condemned to eternal exclusion from this blessing? Must we extinguish every feeling, and become a prey to total insensibility, like so many beings, who say that they find themselves at ease? Must every emotion of the soul be suppressed, which promises happiness, but which a prevailing fatality destroys? In this painful struggle, I have

 almost

almost succeeded, but at the expence of every good quality I possessed. I know this to be the case; yet how trivial is the loss! but for whom shall I henceforth endeavour to preserve a single amiable qualification?

I am now less intimate with Theresa; I have an air of constraint in my conversation and deportment, which excites in me a sort of disgust for myself. Failings like these become me, for has not Leonce deemed me unworthy of him, and why should he not have reason on his side? You are desirous, my dear Louisa, that I should return to you; but will you be able to recognize me? I have imposed a laborious task upon myself, which has strangely altered every attraction I possessed; and was it not expedient to arm my mind against the evils which I endure? To awake without hope, to drag every minute of the long day like a painful burthen, to find no longer any interest in my habitual occupations, to look upon nature

without pleasure, and the future without a plan—good heavens! what a destiny! and if I give way to my grief, would you imagine what idea, what unworthy idea fills my mind? the necessity of coming to an explanation with Leonce.

I fancy to myself, that I could say a few words to him, that might amply avenge my cause—but to what purpose should I attempt to seek revenge? Pride alone can preserve me any remnant of his esteem. Yet, can he avoid desiring to see me? It is in my power to refuse that favour; I ought and will refuse it.

What has ruined me, my Louisa, is a too great facility of character. I now feel an admiration for the qualities, and even the faults which procure an ascendancy over other minds. I love and prize coldness, disdain, and resentment. Leonce shall see if I cannot resemble him—What shall he see? Alas! he considers me no more; while I am agitated with passion, he reposes in the calm of indifference.

 My

My life is in no sense connected with his; he continues his journey, and leaves me behind, having seen me with indifference fall from his car in his victorious career.

You speak to me of retirement—Indeed I hold the world in abhorrence, but solitude is likewise odious to me.

In the gloom which surrounds me, I am haunted with the idea, that not one person on earth feels interested in my fate. Not one — pardon me, it was Leonce alone I thought of—fatal sentiment, which tears my heart, and leaves no room for the tender passions which once possessed it. It is for you, my dear sister, it is for you alone I strive to live. With respect to Madame de Vernon, whom I loved so tenderly, she only excites sentiments of sorrow and aversion;—from my heart, I vent the bitterest reproaches against her, which alas! perhaps Leonce only justly merits. Let me, however, beware of injustice, the first crime of the unfortunate. As Madame de Vernon is de-

sirous

sirous of seeing me, I will receive her; she writes me word, that my refusal afflicts her. I do not wish to give her any uneasiness; perhaps when I see her, she will regain her former influence over me. I seek in vain for an interesting circumstance, an agreeable moment, as if invoking heaven for the greatest blessings of existence. I am inclined to imagine that a cessation from sorrow is impossible, and that nothing but grief and misfortune exist in the world.

LETTER III.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

July 30.

I HAVE seen Madame de Vernon; she came to pass two days at Bellerive. I was walking alone on my terrace, when I

perceived her at a distance. At sight of her, I was seized with such a tremor, that, to prevent myself from falling, I hastened to sit down. Upon her approach, however, I recovered myself; a sentiment of pride and irritation sustained my spirits, and I rose to meet her, in order to conceal my confusion.

Every feature of her countenance was marked with sorrow and melancholy. We both remained silent for some time; at last, she began by informing me, that her daughter was on the point of quitting her, and going to establish herself with her husband in a separate house. I asked her if this plan originated with herself— No, replied she, on the contrary, it deranges my circumstances, and terminates the hopes I had formed of being surrounded by my family; but who can reasonably indulge the hopes of happiness? — I sighed—You have made, however, many sacrifices for the welfare of your daughter, said I, with some severity; she, at least, owes

owes you the debt of gratitude.—You accuse me—(replied she, after some moments of reflection)—you accuse me of having made a poor defence of you to Leonce. I am willing to deserve this reproach; yet, I assure you, his resentment was not to be appeased; your enemies had prejudiced him against you, before I saw him; the reprehensions you had encountered, had shocked his respect for the public opinion; and both your characters are so repugnant, that you must inevitably have been unhappy together. Did I commission you to judge our difference, replied I, and did you not accept, or rather canvas for the office of my justification? You likewise, cried she, you too are desirous of forsaking me; you are more entitled to do so than my daughter, and I resign myself to my lot without a ſtruggle. Having said these words, she sat down; I saw her turn pale, and tremble; at first, I confess without any emotion on my part; for I have suffered

suffered fo much for this week past, that my heart has become less sensible to the afflictions of others; yet when she shed tears, I perceived myself affected; I took her by the hand, and requested her to juftify her conduct. She remained silent, and continued to weep without making me any reply.

It was the first time in my life that I beheld her in this state, and the tender recollections of our former intimacy pleaded her cause in my heart. Well, Madame de Vernon, said I, I can still love you sufficiently, to pardon you for the misery that must attend me through life; you have done me no service with Leonce, but it was his heart that ought to have pleaded my cause; it was he who ought to have known how to make the best apology for me, he who was the object of my affections, and who was firmly persuaded of my attachment to him: but yet how could you bring yourself to precipitate his marriage? Was not my consent necessary, after

after the confession I had made to you? You are a mother: did not I become your daughter, by entrusting you with the depository of my happiness? Yes, said she, with a sigh, you are my daughter, and still dearer to me than a daughter; I confess myself guilty, I acknowledge my fault; at the same time her paleness increased, and the changes of her countenance became more frequent and remarkable. I was moved with this affecting spectacle, and threw myself into her arms with these words:—"I freely forgive you; if my death must be the consequence, remember that I have forgiven you." She fixed her eyes on me with the deepest emotion, and actually seemed on the point of throwing herself at my feet, but recovering herself on a sudden, she rose, and requested my permission to retire, and take a solitary walk for a few moments.

When she was at a distance, I came to a determination to question her on every circumstance

circumstance that took place during my absence. Upon her return, I endeavoured to do so; but this conversation was extremely irksome to her. As for myself, I was kept in a state of painful hesitation, between the eagerness with which I devoured her replies, and the sentiment of compassion for her sufferings, which made me reluctant to insist on the particulars of her details. If she attempted to deceive me by a false display of her dexterity, our connexion was dissolved for ever; yet she painted every circumstance with so much truth, and developed the gradual shades of her secret desires in favour of her daughter, with the diligent performance of the task that I had imposed on her, in a manner so satisfactory, that she maintained over me the absolute ascendancy of truth. I condemned her in secret, but I loved her still; and as her manners were natural and unaffected, her influence continued as before. She confessed to me, but not without confusion, that she had actually pressed Leonce to conclude

conclude a match with her daughter; but she assured me, that he had made up his mind never to marry me, after the bustle occasioned by the duel with M. de Serbellane. He was convinced, she said, that the world would finally discover, that I had brought together a lady and her lover, at my house, without the knowledge of her husband; and that, as the death of M. D'Ervins was the consequence, it was a circumstance which I must not expect the world to forgive. The specious pretext of political opinions, under which this unfortunate accident was cloaked, was more displeasing to him than the naked truth itself. To conclude, Madame de Vernon added, that Leonce had received a letter from his mother, conceived in the strongest terms against me; and frequently repeated, that my destiny must have been very unhappy with two persons, who would have regarded most of my good qualities in the light of faults.

I rejected, with disdain, such disagreeable topics of consolation; nor could I see with what propriety they came from her. I liked still less her repeated counsels to avoid Leonce, and to go to pass some time with you, until he should set out for Spain, according to his design. In this respect, her counsels harmonized with my own resolutions; but I had not resigned to Madame de Vernon the privilege of directing my conduct. It was, in a manner, in spite of all my resolution, that I was captivated by her gentleness and grace.

In the course of this conversation, I asked her, if Leonce had not imagined, that I took too lively an interest in the fate of M. de Serbellane; but she repelled with great ease an insinuation which might have been agreeable to me. In reality, the transient jealousy with which M. de Serbellane inspired Leonce, was entirely done away, by his consciousness of the secret of Madame d'Ervins. No, Louisa, I have no longer

longer any sentiment on which my heart may repose with confidence.

Madame de Vernon afterwards spoke to me concerning Matilda and Leonce. He does not love her, said she: since their marriage, he seldom sees her, and with reluctance; but she is better calculated for him than any other woman, because she will never give the world room to talk about her; and such should be the disposition of the wife of a man so feelingly alive to the slightest censure. As for Matilda, she will love Leonce with all the powers of her soul; nor will she entertain any doubt of the reciprocal affection of her husband: such is her confidence in the general influence of a sense of duty. She is not apt to make observations on his conduct, and she passes the best part of the day in the practice of devotion. She will not be very discriminating in point of jealousy; but if any striking circumstances should discover the attachment of Leonce for another woman, she would then be as violent

violent as she is now calm; and, from the stiff starchness of her mind, and the inflexibility of her principles, she would no longer be permitted to enjoy a moment of repose.

Alas! said I, it shall not be Delphine who will disturb her peace. There is nothing to be dreaded from me—Am I not a sacrificed, ruined being? Alas! Sophia, was it kind in you?—But let us say no more on the subject of Leonce. Let me taste the only pleasure of which my soul is still susceptible,—the pleasure of your conversation.

Madame de Vernon wished to see Madame d'Ervins, which the latter refused. As Theresa did not appear, while Madame de Vernon was at Bellerive, I passed two days in her company. I acknowledge, that, on the second day, I felt some consolation; for there is an inexpressible charm in the society of Madame de Vernon, which secures my attachment to her: she does not now inspire me with a perfect esteem,

nor

nor is my confidence in her unlimited as before; but her gracefulness enchants me, and when I am with her, I think she loves me: I am less dejected in her presence; nor can I listen to her for hours, without a confused idea, that she has imparted to me a consolation which I had no reason to expect. But, alas! the illusion was of short duration! When Madame de Vernon departed, I found myself worse than I was before her arrival: the relief she had communicated to me left no lasting impression on my heart.

What a scene of trouble and confusion in my soul! What subversion and instability in my ideas and sentiments! For what purpose, or with what hopes, must I invent for myself a new turn of mind, a new method of existence! I float in the most afflicting uncertainty, between what I was before, and what I am now wishing to become. Grief, grief alone is firmly established with me: it is in the bosom of grief only, that I am able to recollect myself. My plans vary;

my designs clash with each other; my misery is still the same. I am wretched, and change my resolutions only to increase my wretchedness. Louisa, ought we to live, when we are under apprehensions of every hour, every day that approaches, as bringing with them a long train of bitter and tormenting meditations? If time alone does not alleviate my sufferings, does not every source of consolation disappear? The true secret of reason is to await the lenient hand of time; but whosoever waits in vain, has no resource but in death alone.

LETTER IV.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, August 5.

YOU desire to know how I pass my life with Matilda—My life! My life, my friend, is not in that direction. I walk in solitary silence the whole day, and Matilda gives herself no concern on that account. She goes to mass, she sees her bishop, her nuns, and what not? In a word, she is very well. When we meet, politeness and gentleness pass with her for sentiment: she is perfectly content, and loves me not the less. The daughter of her who, above any other woman in the world, possesses the greatest quickness and penetration, and versatility of disposition, goes right forward in the line which is marked for her, without ever comprehending only what is directly addressed

addressed to her observation. It is much better so—I must not make her miserable. Her understanding is a matter of no moment with me, since I never communicate my thoughts to her.

We shall proceed hand in hand on the path that leads to the grave; on that path on which we are doomed to travel together. Our journey will be silent and gloomy like its end; but why therefore be in grief? A single being in the world has changed into the outward pomp of joy, that funeral feast of death, which men call marriage; but that being was guilty of perfidy, and an abyss has separated us for ever.

My dear friend, I wish to avenge M. D'Ervins.—Why should M. de Serbellane be in existence after having killed a man? Has he killed this D'Ervins only? Just heavens! am I still alive? I am not perfectly satisfied with the state of my interior; my head is apt to be disordered occasionally. Anger, above every thing else,

torments

torments me continually: an irritability which you have contributed to diminish, allows me not a moment of repose. I have not a single sentiment of softness about me. If I think of the possibility of meeting her, I indulge the pleasing idea of addressing her with insult: I have no longer any gentleness in my disposition; but now I have less occasion for it." Delphine was remarkable for the sweetness of her temper, and I am determined to resemble her no more.

Some new circumstance increases my ill-humour every day. I was rather surprised, that the departure of Madame d'Albemar had not taken place. I could not help remarking the visit Madame d'Ervins made to her, and this visit I considered a sort of excuse for her conduct. I figured to myself that she had not espoused the cause of M. de Serbellane with too much warmth and extravagance, since the wife of M. d'Ervins had chosen her house for an asylum: and

 though

though this circumstance has made no change in the relation of Madame d'Albemar, and Monsieur de Serbellane, for these twenty-fours, which Madame d'Ervin passed at her house; yet, unhappy man as I am! I felt my resentment appeased. Yesterday, however, on going to my banker's on some business, I found that he received two letters in my presence from M. de Serbellane to Madame d'Albemar, which he dispatched to her that instant, making a pleasantry on her sending several times to inquire if those letters had arrived. I could learn nothing from this incident; but I could expect nothing else, having acted like a fool the whole day. You desire to know, likewise, if Matilda and I live with Madame de Vernon. Matilda wishes for a separate establishment; she loves to be independent in her domestic arrangements; and, moreover, her mother's manner of living is not suitable to her taste. Madame de Vernon goes to bed late, delights in gambling,

and

and sees a deal of company. Matilda is eager to regulate her time according to her principles of devotion. I leave her at perfect liberty to determine as most agreeable to herself; for, in my present state, I am incapable of coming to any determination on any subject whatsoever. I remark nothing, I perceive a difference in nothing, I have only one thought which preys on me, and am constantly endeavouring to conceal it from the world. This is a true picture of what passes within me.

I remarked, however, that Madame de Vernon was more affected by the determination of her daughter, than I should have expected from a woman of her known firmness. She pronounced with a feeble, faultering voice, these words, "Separation and forgetfulness;" but she soon recovered that careless and indifferent mien, with which she knows so well how to conceal her emotions. "Do as you like, daughter," were her words; "people ought not to live together longer than their

mutual happiness requires:" and, having finished these words, she walked out of the apartment. Singular woman! except on one fatal day, she never spoke to me with frankness and with warmth, on any subject whatsoever; but, on that day, she maintained an absolute ascendancy over me. Alas! the sensations of resentment and humiliation which her words excited in me, are deeply impressed on my memory. I beseech you, never to request me to reveal them to you, nor even speak to me upon this subject. I am bound to eternal silence; nor can I ever impart the secret to you. I am now preparing to go to Spain on a visit to my mother; I shall remove myself from this quarter; I have informed Matilda of my design, and intend departing in a month, or sooner perhaps, when I shall be certain not to meet Madame d'Albemar on the road.

A friend of mine has assured me, that Madame de Vernon was much involved in debt. It is very probable; the

pre-

precipitation with which I have signed the settlements, did not allow me to make any inquiries into her circumstances. If Madame de Vernon is incumbered with debts, it is the duty of a daughter to see them paid; and on this supposition my marriage with Matilda may ruin me totally. Well! this is a satisfactory contemplation! Madam d'Albemar will then have heaped every description of calamity on my head; but she will not, perhaps, be conscious, that by uniting my destiny with another person, I have cut myself off from any future enjoyment in life, or even the prospect of spending my days in tranquillity and peace. She will not believe—But, fool that I am, to imagine she thinks of me! does she not write to M. de Serbellane, and receive his letters in reply? Is she not going to meet him? Alas! how much I suffer! Farewell.

LETTER V.

DELPHINE TO MAD[LLE] D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, August 4.

SINCE the earliest period of my existence, you are sensible, my dear sister, that the idea of an all-powerful and merciful Deity has been constantly present to my mind. From this consolatory idea, however, I have derived no succour in the present moment of affliction and despair. The bitter sensation of the injustice which I have experienced concurring with the anguish of my heart, I refused admittance to those pleasing emotions, which prepare the way for the returning empire of religious sentiments. By ceasing to struggle with my natural disposition, I recovered my former habit of mind, and yesterday I experienced some moments of calmness and repose.

Towards

Towards evening, I went down to my garden, and meditated for some time, and with some austerity, on the fate which attends souls endued with sensibility in the intercourse of the world. I endeavoured to suppress the sentiment of tenderness which the image of Leonce revived in my heart, and I was willing to confound him with the number of unjust and cruel men who are eager to tear the heart which surrenders to their attacks. I strove to subdue those youthful and tender sentiments, the charms of which I have felt from early infancy. Life, said I, is a task of labour which requires courage, and conduct.

On the summit of the mountains, at the extremity of the horizon, the thoughts of man seek for a future state, for another world, where the soul may finally repose, where goodness may enjoy the contemplation of itself, where love, in fine, may never be transformed into the bitter suspicions of jealousy, or the mournful sensations of despair. But in the actual state

of things, in this palpable existence, whose pressure we feel on every side, in order to preserve a proper dignity of conduct, and a proud superiority of character and spirit, it is incumbent on us to resist the natural bias to confidence and affection, to rouse the heart when it sinks into weakness, and to lock up within our bosoms those unhappy tendencies, which make us hazard, on the sentiments with which we inspire others, the possession of every comfort and happiness through life. I shall establish for myself, said I again, a fixed and uniform destiny, inaccessible to joy as well as to grief. The days, which are counted to me, shall be filled only by my duties. Above all, I shall endeavour to preserve myself from that fatal reverie which plunges the soul into the gulph of vain hopes and lamentations, which at first bestows a sensation of tranquillity and pleasure, but terminates with sorrow and remorse.

We seem attracted by a supernatural power, which presents a glimpse of happiness through a cloud: the cloud becomes illumined by degrees, and at last discovers an abyss, where we imagined we beheld an endless path of virtue and of bliss.

"Yes"—I continued to repeat, "I will suppress within myself every idea which distinguished me from other women—natural sentiments, impassioned emotions, generous sallies of enthusiasm; but still I must shun grief, odious and dreadful grief. My existence shall be entirely concentrated in my reason, and I ſhall pass through life armed cap-a-pie against others and against myself. Without interrupting these reflections, I got up, and walked with a firmer step, and with more confidence in my own strength. I stopped near the orange-trees which you sent me from Provence; their delicious odours recalled to my remembrance my native country, where these plants of the south grow in abundance in the middle of our gardens. In that instant, one of

those organs, such as I have so often heard in Languedoc, passed along the road, playing one of the airs to which I used to dance in my childhood. I wiſhed to retire, but an irresistible charm detained me; I traced back in memory all the recollections of my early years, your affection for me, the benevolent protection with which your brother shielded my growing youth, the sweet and satisfactory notion I then formed of my own lot, and of society in general. Then I was firmly persuaded that it was sufficient only to be amiable and good, in order that every heart ſhould expand itself at your approach, and that the commerce of the world should consist only of the continued barter of gratitude and affection. Alas! in comparing these delightful illusions with the actual disposition of my soul, I burst into floods of tears, I threw myself on the ground, and sobbed with such violence, that I imagined that I ſhould be suffocated: I prayed that the earth would open its fertile

bosom and close me in eternal rest. Upon raising myself again, I perceived the glittering stars, and the calm and beautiful expanse of Heaven—O God, cried I, thou art there, in that sublime habitation, so worthy of thy omnipotence, and thy sovereign goodness! Are the sufferings of a solitary being lost in this immensity of space? or are thy paternal regards fixed on them, to alleviate them, and make them subservient to virtue? No—thou art not indifferent to the voice of grief, which reveals the secret of the universe—Assist me, Great God! assist me. Alas! for having merely loved, I have not deserved to be forgotten by thee. No creature, during the small number of years which I have passed on the earth, has ever suffered through my means; thou hast never heard a complaint which was caused by my existence. Until this day, I have been an innocent creature; why, then, wilt thou deliver me over to such cruel torments? In pronouncing these words, my dear Louisa,

I

I felt compassion for myself, and a sentiment of this nature is not without its charms.

A more powerful succour now penetrated into my heart. I condemned myself for having delayed so long to have recourse to prayer. I spurned the plan which I had formed of coldness and insensibily; but what I dreaded, was love, and weakness, which sometimes prompted a desire of going to see Leonce, of justifying myself in his eyes, and braving, in order to speak to him, all the duties of our sex, and every sentiment of delicacy. Against these dishonourable resolutions, I found ampler resources in the elevation of my mind towards God, in the promises which I made to him to continue faithful to the dictates of morality, and I returned to my house more fully satisfied with my own resolutions.

Some time after, I entered into conversation with Theresa, whom I had not seen for several days. She passes almoſt all her time in the company only of a venerable Priest, who

who has acquired an influence over her: her design is to go to Bourdeaux to arrange her affairs, as soon as she finds she has nothing to dread from her husband's family. While we were conversing together, I received letters from M. de Serbellane which my banker sent me, as it is under my name he corresponds with Theresa; I delivered them to her. She wept bitterly on reading them, and said to me, I am permitted to receive letters for a time, but in a few months I shall be no longer able to receive them.—I was desirous that ſhe would explain herself more explicitly, but she refused, and I did not venture to insist on her granting my request. I am ignorant by what practices, or by what penances, ſhe endeavours to console herself; without participating her opinions, I never made any attempt to refute them; but who knows, Louisa, whether there be not some species of misfortune for which every remedy of reason is insufficient?

LETTER

LETTER VI.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

I THOUGHT myself much better, my dear sister, the last time I wrote to you; but to-day some of the simplest circumstances, such indeed as naturally occur every day, have filled my heart with sorrow and vexation. The sad and gloomy foundation on which my destiny reposes cannot be altered, and yet my grief renews itself in a thousand forms, and each of them requires a new struggle to defeat it. Oh! who can possibly support existence for any length of time, at such a price as this?

This morning one of my servants brought me from Paris some letters of little importance, and a list of those persons who called at my house during my absence.—I looked over these details of society, which interest me now so little, with listless inattention,

tention, when a printed letter, which I had not noticed, attracted my atttention. I opened it,and saw these words: "M. Leonce de Mondoville has the honour to inform you of his marriage with Mademoiselle de Vernon." The senseless insult of this vain formality is obvious enough, but does not folly predominate in every sentiment of the unhappy: I was in a rage with Leonce: I thought it was not altogether decorous to attend to the punctilios of the world towards a person in my situation. I confidered this message at my door in the light of an insult, as if he had forgotten that he addresesd a sentence of death to me, in the form of a circular note, without condescending to employ a fingle word of condolence or compassion on a subject which he must have known would afflict me. I passed the entire morning in a state of inexpressible irritation. Would you believe it? I began twenty letters to Leonce, and gave full scope to the expression of the misery that oppressed me; but I knew well, I

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assure you, that I should burn them all: of this I was confident; for, though I cannot be responsible for the passions which agitate me, yet, when actions form the subject, of deliberation, then you may rely with confidence, on my prudence and resolution.

This day, so unhappily begun, had still in reserve for me some further impressions peculiarly distressing. Madame de Vernon came to dine with me; half an hour after her arrival, as I was leaning at my window, I beheld, in my avenue, the blue chariot of Leonce, which I knew so well. A frightful tremor seized on me. I imagined he was coming with his wife to complete his barbarous ceremonial. I remained in a state of inexpressible agitation; I looked at Madame de Vernon, and the paleness of my countenance alarmed her so much, that she advanced towards me to prevent me from sinking to the ground. She then perceived the blue chariot which I fixed my eyes upon, without the power of turning them from that object. "It is only my daughter,

daughter," said she instantly; "he will not be here, I am well assured he would not think of coming to your house." These words produced very different effects upon me, but I recovered breath when I found he was not coming. The expectation of so affecting a circumstance inspired me with an insupportable terror; but I was overspread with blushes, when I repeated to myself the words of Madame de Vernon—*he would not think of coming to your house.* She is convinced then, that he thinks me unworthy of his presence, or perhaps that he has compassion for my weakness, and the love which he imagines I ſtill feel for him. Alas! were I but to see him, how calm, how proud and disdainful I should be!

While I was endeavouring to recover my spirits, the folding-doors of my drawing-room were displayed, and Madame de Mondoville was announced.

Louisa, this was to have been the name of the once happy Delphine, had not

Theresa—Alas! it was not Theresa; it was he himself alone who has betrayed me.—Under cover of this name, once so sweet and so harmonious, when it announced his presence, under cover of this name, Matilda advanced with dignity and confidence; while I, whom she has robbed of that title, dared not lift my eyes towards her, and could scarcely support myself. Her address was plain and simple, and she seemed to have no suspicion of the real motives of my absence, which she attributed to my concern for Madame d'Ervins; and she appeared to me to have improved considerably by the conversation of Leonce. *I am not the rose*, says an oriental Poet, *but I have dwelt with it.* Just heavens! what is to become of me, condemned as I am to behold him no more!

In the course of our conversation, if Matilda seemed to employ a gesture, or an expression familiar to Leonce, the circulation of my blood was stopped, at a recollection so agreeable of itself, but so offensive to

me when Matilda was the cause. One of Leonce's servants waited at table, and these minute circumstances of private life made me sick at heart. If I continue to live here, I must be exposed every moment to some fresh mortification; I must be compelled to see Matilda without ceasing, to be an hourly witness of her happiness, to see her drink the cup of joy drop by drop— No, it is impossible, I cannot bear it.— When I was obliged to address myself to her, and offer her what was on the table, I avoided calling her by name; Madame de Vernon frequently addreffed her as Madame de Mondoville, and every time I started at the sound. I perceived, without difficulty, that Madame de Vernon was offended with her daughter, but I avoided every topic that might introduce an animated conversation. I could scarce articulate the most trifling words without betraying my confusion. After dinner, Madame de Vernon enquired of Matilda, when her new apartment was to be ready. "In six days," replied Matilda,

Matilda;" and then turning herself towards me, she said: "I see plainly that this new arrangement is displeasing to my mother, but I submit the matter to your judgment, cousin, whether it is not proper that we should live separate? Our taste and sentiments are extremely different: my mother loves play, she passes a part of the night in the midst of company, and I love solitude and retirement; we should both be much happier, in my opinion, if we continued to see one another as usual, but without living under the same roof."—"Let us drop this subject," said Madame de Vernon to her rather hastily; "I was willing to modify my habits of life, I should even have sacrificed them without reluctance, if I thought myself neceſſary to your happiness. With respect to your opinions, as it is I who superintended your education, I should certainly feel no difficulty in complying with a turn of thinking which it was my own desire you should adopt. You speak to me of nothing but taste, and habits;

you never mention a word about affection or attachment. Whatever degree of regard you have for me, it is plain it has little influence over your plans of living. Well, let us say no more on this subject; I had only one illusion left, and you have convinced me, that one alone is sufficient to embitter my life, however barren it may be in other respects.

Matilda reddened at this observation: I pressed the hand of Madame de Vernon, and we all three remained in silence for some minutes; which Madame de Vernon broke at last, by asking Matilda, if she had gone to see her cousin Madame de Lebensei. I did not imagine, replied Matilda, that you would require of me to go to see a woman who has married a second husband, while her first was living: so scandalous a circumstance shall never be authorised by my presence.—But, observed Madame de Vernon, her first husband was a foreigner, and a protestant, and ſhe has been divorced from him, according to the laws

laws of his country.—And as to his religion, said Matilda, do you consider that as nothing? She is a Catholic—could she think herself at liberty to act against the precepts of her religion?—You must know, said Madame de Vernon, that her first husband was a very contemptible man; that she has loved the second for six years; and that he has rendered her the most generous services.—I did not expect, I confess, interrupted Matilda, that my mother would justify the conduct of Madame de Lebensei.—I do not know if I justify it, replied Madame de Vernon; but admitting that Madame de Lebensei had committed a fault, yet Christian charity enjoins indulgence towards her.—Christian charity, said Matilda, is always accessible to repentance; but when the guilty persist in their crimes, charity prescribes that we should at least remove from their contagion.—And do you really wish, Matilda, that Madame de Lebensei should quit her husband?—Yes, undoubtedly,

edly, cried Matilda, for M. de Lebensei is not, and cannot be her husband? They say, moreover, that he is a person whose political and religious opinions are of an evil tendency; but I do not meddle with these matters—he is a protestant, and, as such, I am persuaded that he must be a man of loose morals. This is not the case with Madame de Lebensei; she is a Catholic; she is my relation: I must repeat to you, that my conscience will not allow me to visit her.—Well then, I must go to see her alone, replied Madame de Vernon.—"I will attend you thither, my dear aunt, said I, if you are willing to permit me."—"Amiable Delphine!" said Madame de Vernon, with a sigh, "we shall then go together: she lives at two leagues distance from your house, in retirement and solitude: and being sensible how much her conduct has been not only criticised, but calumniated, she does not wish to expose herself again to the society of the world, which ill accords

accords with her happiness."—"Have the goodness to tell her," said Matilda with some vivacity, "that it is not on account of the busy loquacity of the world, that I am hindered from visiting her. I am no slave to opinion, and no one would encounter it with more alacrity than myself, if the minutest of my duties were interested on the occasion. On the first symptom of repentance, which I ſhall discover in Madame de Lebensei, I ſhall fly to see her, and serve her with all my power."—"Matilda," said I unguardedly, "do you think that people repent of having married the object of their affections?"—Scarcely had these words escaped from me, when I dreaded to have drawn her attention to the sentiment which dictated them. But in this I was mistaken, for she made no discovery from my expressions; but only thought the sentiment had an immoral tendency, and as such she combated it with warmth. I continued silent; she returned to Paris with her mother, and I was happy

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to find a termination of my constraint and uneasiness. But, alas! what bitter sentiments revive in my heart! How unreasonable is the conduct of Leonce! He sends me no word of comfort; he wishes not to see me; in fine, he overwhelms me with scorn and contempt!—Louisa, I have written the word, and, much as it has cost me, I have been able to write it; for it is with all the haughty disdain of my soul, that I view the injustice even of Leonce. Notwithstanding, I wish, even at the price of my miserable existence, I wish that it was possible for me to meet him once more by chance, without giving him reason to suspect that I sought for an interview. I should then be able (do not doubt it) to recover his esteem, and win him back again. I am proud of this idea—I love him still, perhaps—but what is above all requisite for me is, that he should restore me that consideration for which he has sacrificed his happiness; I say his happiness, for certainly I was more worthy of his

ambition than Matilda. Is it impossible that some moment of remorse and sorrow may inspire him with a wish to speak to me once more? I beseech you, Louisa, do not haſtily condemn the object of your early cares: the wish that I breathe, Heaven is my witness, is not formed with a view to deliver myself over to the most criminal sentiments. My desire is only to have it in my power to refuse to see him, and that he may know my determination to be irrevocable on that subject. I wish him to be punished by my resolution, and he will then cease to consider me as the weakest of all beings, and the moſt unworthy of his inflexibility of character. I am a prey, my dear Louisa, to the most poignant sorrows, not only those which I communicate in friendship to you, but others which I cannot easily describe. Pardon me, if I sink under the weight of misery; it is for your sake alone, that I am still alive.

LETTER VII.

DELPHINE TO MAD^LLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, August 8.

AM I, then, doomed not to take a single step which does not cruelly renew the scenes of sorrow with which I am encompassed? For what purpose was I brought to see Madame de Lebensei yesterday? She is happy in her marriage; and she is so, because her husband has had the spirit to bid defiance to opinion; because he has set at nought the silly slanders of the world; and is, in this respect, the very reverse of Leonce. Madame de Lebensei is happy; and I had reason to be more so, as her character is not entirely out of the reach of malignant observation. Her heart is not disposed to love with equal warmth with mine: for who could inspire any woman with a passion so tender as that which I feel

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for Leonce? Madame de Vernon took me yesterday on a visit to Cernay, according to our previous agreement. Upon our arrival at that place, we found that M. de Lebensei was not at home. We perceived that Madame de Lebensei was affected at our interview: she endeavoured to conceal her emotion from us; but it was easy to discern, that a visit from her relations was an extraordinary event with her, in the social proscription in which she lived.

You were acquainted with Madame de Lebensei at Montpellier: she is about thirty; her countenance is serene and regular, and the expression of her features invariably the same. We conversed some time on those indifferent topics, the routine of worldly intercourse, invented for the purpose of cloaking the peculiarities of our characters and sentiments; but this species of conversation was totally uninteresting to a person like Madame de Lebensei, who was excluded from the busy scene of life. However, she dreaded introducing any subject of discourse

discourse which might induce us to discover our sentiments on her own peculiar situation. I ventured to name some persons of her own acquaintance to her. It appeared, as far as I could discover from her answers, that she was not in the habit of seeing them; but I could perceive that she felt their dereliction of her; and even this I could collect only from the disdain with which she spurned every thing that appeared like an attempt to justify her conduct, or that bore any resemblance to an effort to engage hersel again in the intercourse of the world. She is desirous of breaking every link that might connect her with society; but this is not the effect of indifference—it arises from a wish of preserving herself from the disagreeable sensations which a contrary conduct would expose her to. Madame de Lebensei has acquired such a habit of constraint in company, that it was a difficult point with us to induce her to converse with freedom and confidence. However, when Madame de Vernon made some polite

apology to her, for the absence of her daughter, these words escaped from her:— "You have the goodness, my dear Madam, to conceal from me the real cause of this absence; which is, that Madame de Mondoville is unwilling to see me, because I have married M. de Lebensei." Madame de Vernon smiled at this observation: I blushed, and Madame de Lebensei continued—"You, Madam," said she, addressing herself to Madame de Vernon, "who have known me from my infancy, and who have been always in friendship with my family—it is you I have every reason to thank, for visiting me under these peculiar circumstances: to Madame d'Albemar I am likewise indebted, for the favour she has done me, in accompanying you on this occasion. I can assure you, that I do not seek for the intercourse of the world: I wish to put it out of the power of the world to disturb my internal happiness; but still I set a high value on such a mark of kindness, and I feel as it becomes

me to do. Her eyes overflowed with tears when she had done speaking: she rose to conceal them from us, and conducted us to see her garden, and the different parts of her house.

Every thing in the house and garden was arranged with care, taste, and simplicity. It was an establishment for life, and nothing useful was neglected. Every object called to mind the time already passed in this abode, and the still longer period which they destined for their future habitation in it. Madame de Lebensei appeared to me to possess a calm imagination, without any brilliancy; and a correct and enlightened understanding, without any elevation of sentiment. I could not well conceive how, with a character of this description, her conduct should have been that of a person of vivid feelings and passions; and I was very desirous of being acquainted with the causes of this apparent contradiction. But Madame de Vernon did not concur with me to gratify my curiosity, and avoided trou-

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bling her on such a subject. She appeared buried in melancholy and absence of mind, and took no part in the conversation.

As we passed over Madame de Lebensei's garden, I discovered, in a retired grove, an altar raised on a bank of turf, with this inscription: "To six years of "happiness; Eliza and Henry." Lower down were these words: "Love and courage will always unite the hearts of those "who love." These words made a deep impression on me: I fancied that they formed a mournful contrast with my own destiny, and I remained absorbed in melancholy reflections, before this monument of happiness. Madame de Lebensei approached me, and I felt an irresistible impulse in the agitation of my spirits, to enquire into her history. Alas! cried I involuntarily, will you not let me know how you attained this happiness? I imagined, before now, that there was not a single happy person on earth. Madame de Lebensei seemed affected with my sensibility,

sibility, and spoke to me, with an expression of the most amiable tenderness: "You shall know, Madam," said she, "since it is your desire, every thing that concerns my destiny: I cannot be insensible to the wish of endeavouring to merit your esteem. A sentiment of timidity, which you will allow to be natural, would make it painful to me, to speak for a long time about myself; but I shall have more confidence in writing, and I shall communicate my sufferings to you, by letter." Madame de Vernon rejoined us soon after, and was witness to my expression of gratitude.

Madame de Lebensei requested us both to stop a few days at her house: I refused, at least for that time, as I had not previously acquainted Theresa with this circumstance. We promised, however, to return to her again, and I in particular was desirous of seeing Madame de Lebensei a second time, and I should not wish to hurt her by a refusal. Persons in her

situation are much liable to susceptibility, a susceptibility which tender minds should be tenacious of respecting, for even the most trifling circumstances have a mighty influence on the happiness of persons of such delicate sentiments and sensations.

On returning with Madame de Vernon, I was struck, then, more than in the morning, with her paleness and dejection; and I asked her, at what hour she had retired to rest the night before.—At five o'clock in the morning, replied she.—You have then been engaged at play?—Yes.—Good God! cried I, how came you to abandon yourself to this fatal inclination? I thought you had renounced it a long time ago?—I am weary of the common formalities of life, replied she, I feel a want of interest, of emotion, and I find no pleasure in a state of repose. Play animates me, without any disagreeable sensation; it abstracts me from every other idea; and in this manner, my time glides insensibly away, which otherwise

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would hang heavy on my hands.—Is it becoming in you, said I, to hold such language—you, who have so good an understanding?— As for understanding, interrupted she, I don't pretend to much; you know I have only a talent for talking, and none for reading or reflexion. I have been educated in this manner, and it is a fixed habit: when I am in company, I can think; when in solitude, I become fatigued and disgusted.—But do you find no pleasure, said I, in the sentiments which you inspire?—You have observed, said she, the conduct of my daughter towards me; of a daughter for whom I have made so many sacrifices. I am afraid, that in being desirous to serve her, I have become less worthy of your friendship: you still allow me a share in your esteem, but your confidence in me is not the same as before: every thing is altered for the worst with me; nevertheless, the moments that I pass with you, are by far the most agreeable of any; so

let us not converse on the subject of my grievances, at the very instant in which I forget them.—She then turned the conversation on Madame de Lebensei; and as her manners are at once graceful and dignified, it is impossible to persist in speaking to her on any subject she does avoid, and equally impossible to resist the charm of the sentiments which she does express.

She made herself so perfectly agreeable on the road, that I felt a momentary suspension from the anguish of my sorrows. The vivacity of her imagination, the delicacy of her expressions, an air of softness and of negligence, which obtains every thing, and asks nothing; the talent of placing her soul so much in harmony with yours, that you imagine that you think with her, and at the same moment of time, every thing which her mind developes in yours; these advantages, which belong to her alone, can never totally relinquish their influence. When

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I am in company with Madame de Vernon, it seems impossible for me to avoid confiding in her friendship; yet, when I am far from her, my doubts revive, and repossess my mind. How capricious is the human heart! We entertain sentiments which we endeavour to justify to ourselves, because we feel a secret instigation to condemn them; and we yield to some peculiar graces, to minds of a certain description, with a species of timidity, which adds perhaps, still more to their seductive influence, a charm which we ineffectually endeavour to resist.

This morning, when I rose, after having passed the night almost entirely in reflecting on the happy and quiet asylum of Cernay, I received the letter which Madame de Lebensei had promised to write to me. I now present you with this letter. You may judge, my dear Louisa, what must have been my feelings during my perusal of it.

Madame

Madame de Lebensei to Madame d'Albemar.

" Among the number of sacrifices which I am bound to make, the only one, my dear Madam, which I should find it difficult to support, would be to have had the pleasure of knowing you, without making any attempt to prove to you, that I do not deserve the injustice, of which my enemies wished to make me the victim. Attach some value to my efforts to merit your approbation; for, until this day, I have been satisfied with my felicity, and proud in the object of my choice, and have never taken any steps to give an explanation of my conduct to any person whatsoever.

" When I formed the resolution of obtaining a divorce from my former husband, and some years after of marrying M. de Lebensei, I was perfectly sensible that I was ruining myself in the opinion of the world; and from that instant, I made a resolution

resolution never to appear in it again. The greatest punishment of which I can form an idea, is, in my opinion, that of struggling, in the midst of society, against the received opinions and prejudices of the world. To encounter a difficulty of this description, a great share of audacity, or even of humility, is requisite. I own that I possessed neither of these qualities in a sufficient degree, and I was not long in discovering, that a woman who does not yield to general prejudices, ought to live in retirement, if she wishes to preserve her ease and dignity. But there is a vast difference between what is bad in itself, and what is bad only in the opinion of others; and with this consideration it will appear, that solitude sharpens the remorse of an evil conscience, while it consoles the innocent under the injustice of mankind. Had I been very agreeable, or very remarkable for grace and worldly accomplishments, the sacrifice of my expecta-

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tions would have been painful in the extreme; but I was only an ordinary woman in conversation, though my manner of thinking was distinguished by strong sense and profound observation. I might, therefore, renounce the world, without dreading the continual regrets of vanity, which sooner or later disturb the tenderest affections.

"I had nothing to dread, moreover, from the resuscitation of exalted passion. I possess some reason, although my conduct haa not been in exact conformity with what is commonly called so. It was not till after calm and deep reflexion, that I came to a resolution so contradictory to all common rules; and as I formed my plan from a due consideration of my Henry's character, and my own, none of these motives which decided me can cease to have influence on my conduct.

"The events of my life are very simple, and very little diversified; the series of

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my impressions forms the only interest in my history.

"A Hollander, M. de T. had brought a very ample fortune from the Colonies, and came to pass some time at Montpellier, for the re-establishment of his health. He soon conceived, I knew not why, a violent passion for me, demanded me in marriage; and having obtained his wish, carried me into his own country, where I was a perfect stranger to every body. At the age of eighteen, I was compelled to break through all the tender ties of life. I was desirous of fixing my affections on my husband; but there was a constant jarring in our minds and tempers, which prevented the gradual growth of sympathy. He loved me, because he thought me handsome, for, in any other respect, he might be said to hate me. This species of affection which he felt for me, necessarily added to my uneasiness; for had not my features been agreeable to him, he would have kept himself at a distance from me,

and

and not have incommoded me every moment in the day by faults, which rendered him totally insupportable. Avarice, cruelty, obstinacy, and every narrowness of mind and soul, were conspicuous in his character. I was engaged in a constant conflict with these odious qualities, and every day was meditating some new plan of happiness, which were all shipwrecked against his active and wayward mediocrity. He had acquired his fortune in America, by exercising a despotic power over his unhappy slaves. There he had contracted a habit of considering himself superior to every body around him;—noble sentiments, elevated ideas, appeared to him only affectation or idiotism; and, if any instance of generous virtue occurred within the circle of his knowledge, he made it a subject of ridicule. If you opposed his desires, he was not only inflamed with anger against you, but also imputed the worst of motives. It was his opinion, that there should be but one

consideration

consideration in the world, to which every thing else should give way, that is, the art of growing rich, and the talent of promoting one's own interest in all cases whatever. He served to convince me of a truth, the force of which I have doubly felt, both during the period of my misery, and the happy years which followed it—that enlarged information, and the character and turn of thought which are styled philosophical, are as necessary to preserve the charms, the independence, and the satisfaction of private life, as they are to the splendour of any other sphere or rank in society. In order to live in peace with M. de T. it was necessary for me to renounce every sentiment of goodness, of which I thought myself possessed; there was no other method of keeping on good terms with him, but by concurring in his odious opinions.

"Although he never endeavoured to please, he was very uneasy about the opinion the world formed of him. He had

had neither that indifference for the judgment of mankind, which philosophy inspires, nor that respect for general esteem which his anxiety for obtaining it might naturally have prompted. He wished to acquire what he had determined not to merit; and this sort of conduct gave him an air of duplicity, in his transactions with strangers, and a giddy violence in his domestic deportment.

"His mind was employed, from morning to night, on the thoughts of enlarging his fortune; and I had not even the sasisfaction of considering an augmentation of fortune in the light of a new source of enjoyment for myself, being perfectly assured that any accession to his wealth would immediately suggest to him the idea of a diminution of expense. I carefully avoided disputing with him on this subject, from a dread of prolonging our conversation, and of giving too free a scope to our real sentiments on each other, in the heat of argument.

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"The exercise of any one virtue was no longer in my power: my time was totally engrossed by the cruel harshness, or by the indolence of my husband. At times, the sentiments of religion came to my relief: yet how little influence do they exert over me, since the commencement of my present happiness! Unvaried and continual sufferings, a lasting connexion with a person unworthy of one's attachment, spoil the temper, instead of improving it. The soul which has never experienced happiness, cannot ever be perfectly sweet and benevolent; and I still preserve some severity in my character. I am indebted for it to the years of misery which I have passed. Yes—it is a sentiment which I do not dread to express; if there was ever a circumstance which would justify a complaint against our Creator, it is from the bosom of an ill-suited marriage that this complaint would escape; it is on the threshold of the house inhabited by those ill-fated pairs we ſhould engrave the beau-

tiful expressions of Danté, which preclude every further idea of hope. No—God has never condemned us to endure so great a misery! Vice submits to it in appearance only, and transcends its limits every day: virtue ought to dissolve the union, when ſhe becomes incapable of renouncing the bliss of mutual love, a blessing, the sacrifice of which is more repugnant to our nature, than even the contempt of death.

"I ſhall not, on this occasion, Madam, submit to you my opinion on the subject of divorce. When M. de Lebensei will have the happiness of knowing you, he will explain to you, better than any other person, the arguments which convinced me: I desire only to describe to you those sentiments and affections which have decided my destiny.

"One day, being at the French Ambassador's house, at the Hague, it was announced to me, that a young Frenchman had arrived that morning from Paris, and that he was to be presented to us in the evening.

evening. A lady told me, that this Frenchman passed for an unpolished being, a man of learning, a philosopher, and I know not what; every thing that so few Frenchmen are at the age of five-and-twenty. She added likewise, that he had finished his studies at Cambridge, and that, of course, he was spoiled by English manners: but as, in my opinion, there is not in existence a nobler character than the English, I did not perceive myself prejudiced against a man who resembled that people. I inquired his name, and she told me that it was Henry de Lebensei, a Protestant gentleman of Languedoc. His family was allied to mine: I had never seen him, but he knew the abode of my infancy; he was a Frenchman; he had at least heard of my relations, and this idea made a deep impression on me, considering the distance and absence of every thing which I considered dear.

"M. de Lebensei arrived at the Ambassador's with many other young men, and I immediately

I immediately recognized the picture which had been drawn to me. He had the dress and the exterior of an Englishman; there was nothing remarkable in his looks, except the elegance and dignity of a most expressive countenance. I was not struck with his first appearance; but the more I conversed with him, the more I admired the extent and force of his understanding, and the more I was convinced that no other character was better adapted to my own.

"From that day to the present, after a period of six years, so far from reproaching myself for loving Henry de Lebensei, I have been constantly of opinion, that if I separated from him, I should reject the special favour of Providence, and the most evident sign of its protection, in giving me a friend, who restored me to the use of my natural qualities, and conducts me in the path of good morals, of order, and of happiness.

"You

"You are no stranger, perhaps; to the cruel treatment that I experienced from M. de T. when he discovered my passion for M. de Lebensei. I had no children; and I demanded a divorce, according to the laws of Holland. M. de T. before he would consent to it, was for insisting on my absolute renunciation of all my fortune; and when I rejected this condition, he confined me at his country-seat, and threatened me with death. His love was now changed into hatred, and his whole conduct was in subjection to his domineering passion, covetousness. Henry rescued me by his courage, exposed his life a thousand times for my deliverance, and conveyed me at last, after two years trouble, into France; during which time he rendered me every service which love and generosity could inspire.

"My divorce was pronounced: I shall not weary you by a recital of the pains which it cost me to obtain it; it is Henry whom I wish to acquaint you with the circumstances

stances that attended it; and all my destiny is concentered in him. I shall perhaps astonish you, my youthful and charming Delphine, when I say, that it was not such a passion as is felt in the effervescence of youth, which determined me to choose Henry for the depositary of my happiness. There is reason in the sentiments I feel for him; that reason which calculates the future as well as the present, and takes into consideration the qualities and defects which may form the foundation of a lasting connexion.

"Much is said of the follies which love gives rise to; but I find more true sensibility in the moderation of the heart than its caprices: this wisdom consists, however, in loving, in our youth, him only who shall be equally dear to us in every stage of life. What a sweet precept of morality and happiness! Indeed, good morality and happiness are inseparable, unless when the fictitious combinations of society intermingle

intermingle their baleful poison in the cup of a natural and simple life.

"Henry de Lebensei is certainly a man the most remarkable for his good sense that it is possible to meet with: a serious and studious education has furnished him with a variety of knowledge on every philosophical subject; and a very vivid imagination inspires him with new ideas on every object of his observation. He takes delight in conversing with me, more especially, because a sort of uncouth and distant reserve renders him generally silent in society. As his mind is active, and his temper serious, the more contracted the circle is, the greater fertility and vivacity he displays in conversation; and, when with me only, he is still more agreeable than he is in the midst of a mixed society.

"For me, he reserves the treasures of his thoughts, and his accomplishments, while the generality of men become animated in proportion to the number of their audience,

dience, and inflated with vanity; yet, in the intimacy of domestic life, they lose their powers of bestowing gratification. All who love solitude, or whose peculiar circumstances have induced them to resort to it, will tell you of what importance, in their habitual enjoyments, is the necessity of a communication of ideas, and a mutual display of sentiments. It is this taste for conversation which communicates an interest to that mode of life, in which tranquillity is purchased at the expence of variety: for, do not imagine that the eagerness which Henry discovers for my society, proceeds only from his love for me. My reason tells me, moreover, that we ought never to rely on the qualities which love bestows, or to imagine ourselves exempt from the faults which it corrects. What makes me perfectly secure of my happiness with Henry is, that I know his temper and disposition, such as they really are, independent of the passion which he feels for me, and that I am the

only

only person in the world before whom he exhibits without disguise his virtues as well as his imperfections.

"Henry possesses a species of gaiety and good-humour, which can only be relished in the most intimate familiarity of sentiments: it is not the grace of ornament, but the grace of originality, the unaffected ease of which considerably augments its charm. When intimacy is arrived at this point, that we find charms in the sports of an infant, in a pleasantry twenty times repeated, in the minutest circumstances, which nobody but the two most interested persons can easily form a conception of, a thousand secret ties are twisted round the heart, and a word, a sign, is sufficient, or the slightest allusion to any pleasing circumstance of former times, to recall to memory from the most distant quarters of the world every object of affection.

"I am little disposed to jealousy, but Henry has never given me the slightest reason to feel that fatal passion. I am sensible that

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I am the only person that knows him, and understands his sentiments, and that he enjoys the satisfaction of being known, and esteemed by me, without the necessity of any formal expression of attachment. He is a man of the most independent opinions, and feels a considerable contempt for men in general, though very benevolent to each of them in particular. He has been much exposed to detraction, especially since, in political disputes, he has shewn himself an advocate for the revolution. He pleads guilty to the charge, and nothing in the world could persuade him to a justification, or even a demonstration of his real sentiments.

"As soon as this demonstration may come to be demanded of him, it becomes impossible to him on such a supposition. The natural turn of his temper is to me a further guarantee of his fidelity; for if he should form a new connexion, he would be obliged to enter into explanations of himself on his imperfections, on his good qualities;

lities; which explanations are totally unnecessary in his intercourse with me. He has always spoken to me by his actions, and it is in such a manner, that a proud, and a calumniated character desires to make itself understood.

"Under the coldness, and even austerity, of his outward deportment, he is more accessible to compassion than any other man; but this secret he conceals, through dread of its being abused: yet, it is well known to me, and I rely upon it. I should really be very unhappy, if his only inducement to seek my company arose from a dread of afflicting me by his absence: but I am convinced of the contrary; and, in the perfect enjoyment of his love, I indulge the pleasing reflection that two of his virtues give me full security for his heart, which are, his invariable truth, and the sweetness of his temper. We are too apt to delude ourselves; but it is obvious, to every observer of society, that men stand in very little need of the company of the female sex.

Such a diversity of interests animates their views, that for the durability of an attachment, the most ardent passion, and the most winning attractions, are not a sufficient security. Principles and qualities of an invariable nature are essentially requisite to preserve the mind from any new impressions, to arrest the caprices of imagination, and fortify the heart before the combat; for, if the struggle takes place, the triumph itself would be no longer the triumph of affection.

" What good qualities, however, what singularities also, must not be united in the character of a man, to have a complete certainty of his invariable and devoted affection! Without this certainty, how rash would be the step which I have taken! For, when a resolution is adopted in opposition to public opinion, there is nothing to support us but ourselves alone. You have formed an engagement to be happy; and, if ever an expression of regret escapes your l ps, your friends and the public will

be

be ready to repulse these stragglers from your heart, and force them thither to take refuge in the only asylum which remains.

"I must not dissemble the political opinions of Henry, the energy of his character, his absolute indifference for the sentiments of others, when in opposition to his own. All these circumstances have proved able auxiliaries to me in my struggle against the dislike of the world. A man, without difficulty, overleaps every obstacle except that of his own conscience; and, if he possesses distinguished talents, it is in the pursuit of glory he seeks to captivate the public esteem: for glory commences at a vast distance from the fleeting circle of our temporary relations, and reaches them only after a length of time. Monsieur de Lebensei, by a singular but a natural contrast, is perfectly indifferent to the opinion of what is termed society, but very ambitious to acquire hereafter the approbation of the enlightened world. As for myself, who can only be known in my own small circle, I do

not deny, that I am sometimes afflicted with the general censure which is attached to my conduct; but, as this censure makes not the slightest impression on Henry, as I am assured he is perfectly indifferent about it, I can easily get rid of my own uneasiness. In a just and reasonable sympathy, a proper regard for the object of our affections, makes us inconsolable for their distress. We are always most ready to forget our own share of the misfortune.

"I was persuaded, that the principles of morality and religion, properly understood, did not forbid me to marry Henry, since, by this resolution, I injured the happiness of no person whatsoever, and it was to God alone I was bound to give an account of my actions. Ought I, then, when Heaven had thrown in my way the only character that could identify with my own, the only man who could draw, from my qualifications and defects, the sources of felicity for us both — ought I to sacrifice this singular destiny, to the dread of evil-speaking,

speaking, on the part of my cold friends, who have so soon forgotten me; on the part of indifferent persons, who scarcely know my name? Their advice would be, for me to renounce the only being that loves me—the only person who protects me in the world, even while they prepare to refuse me relief in case of necessity; if, becoming insulated through deference to their advice, I should ask them for only one of the thousand services, which my Henry would perform for me without enumerating them.

"No;—it is not to the opinions of mankind—it is to virtue alone we must sacrifice the affections of the heart: between God and Love I know no other mediator than Conscience.

"What then is the threatened punishment of society? To see you no more? The punishment is not equal to the severity of the laws which it enacts.

"However, I repeat it to you, Madam, you, who are still in the first years of youth, my example ought not to prevail on any

person to imitate me. The hazard of braving the opinion of the world, is a very critical point for a woman: to attempt it, one must, in the language of the poet, have *triple brass around the heart*; must become insensible to the shafts of calumny, and concentrate within one's self all the warmth of one's sentiments. It is necessary to have the fortitude to renounce the world, to possess the resources which disdain its aid: not to be blessed, however, with either uncommon beauty, or understanding, which might give room for regret, on the loss of the flattering expectations attending on these qualities. Lastly, we must find, in the object of our sacrifices, the never-failing source of the diversified enjoyments of the heart, and of reason: we must walk through life, supported on each other, in loving mutually, and doing good.

"You are now, Madam, acquainted with my situation: you must have perceived that my happiness is not without alloy; but perfect happiness can never be the

lot

lot of a woman, whom the errors of her parents, or her own, have compelled to contract an unhappy marriage. If the child, which I carry in my womb, is to be a daughter, with what attention shall I not watch over her choice! How often shall I not repeat to her, that, with respect to women, all the years of their life depend on a single day! and that, on a single act of their will, depend all the enjoyments of their future destiny!

"When persons whom I esteem condemn the resolution which I have taken, when I am exposed to the weakness or hard-heartedness of my friends, I sometimes cannot find in solitude the repose which I expected; and the recollection of the world invades my retreat, to disturb my peace of mind: but in the moment of my greatest dejection, the appearance of a fine day, with my Henry, relieves my soul. We are both of us still young, and nevertheless we often talk of death: we seek in our woods for some peaceable asylum

lum to depose our ashes; where we shall be united, when succeeding generations, treading on our graves, shall no longer reproach us with our mutual affection.

"We often converse together on the subject of religion, and cast towards heaven our supplicating glances of affection. Our souls, being strengthened by our intimacy, endeavour to penetrate together into the eternal mysteries.

"We exist by ourselves, without any support, without any succour from mankind. M. de Lebensei, I hope, is much happier than I am, for he is much more independent of external assistance. When I smart under the uneasiness which I feel from public opinion, I say to myself, that I should have been too happy, if men had joined their suffrages to my internal happiness; if I had seen, as it were, my felicity repeated in a thousand ways, by their kind looks of approbation. The imperfection of our destiny intermixes some bitter drops with the purest of our pleasures;

pleasures; the pain that I feel—the only pain of my life, secures to me, perhaps, the possession of every thing I hold dear; it acquits me, with respect to grief, which is unwilling to be forgotten; and I shall obtain, perhaps, in compensation, the only blessing, which I now demand of heaven—to die before Henry, to witness his tender cares in my last hour, to hear his sweet voice, thanking me for having made him happy, for having preferred him to every person on earth;—then I shall have lived according to the true destiny for which women are created, to love, and still to love, and at last to restore to God, who has bestowed it on us, a soul which has been solely occupied by tender sentiments and affections.

ELIZA DE LEBENSEI."

Ah! my dear Louisa, after the perusal of this letter, did you not shed some tears for the sorrow which it has revived in my bosom? Have you anticipated all the bitter

bitter reflections which it has suggested to me? How many obstacles has not M. de Lebensei surmounted, in order to marry the woman whom he loved! and with what indifference has not Leonce renounced me! It is only Madame de Lebensei who is concerned at the opinion of the world, for her husband bestows not a single thought upon it; he depends upon his own affections, and submits to love alone: and Leonce—do not think, however, that his character possesses less energy, that he is inferior, in any respect, to any man; but it is love alone he was deficient in. I wish to deceive myself by vain illusions, but, in reality, the evil lies totally in that direction.

Alas! Madame de Lebensei, without reflecting on it, condemns in every line the conduct of Leonce! The grief which I have experienced from the perusal of this letter, will not be totally useless to me; if I ever see him again, I shall be able to address him, I shall be calm and dignified in his presence.

LETTER

LETTER VIII.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

ALAS! Louisa, what have I experienced? What has he said to me? I recollect not a word. I have seen him—my soul is in confusion; I enjoyed a glimpse of hope, and Madame de Vernon has almost totally snatched it from my possession. Perhaps, you may be able to throw some light on my condition. Alas! I am incapable of judging of any circumstance by myself alone.

I received yesterday at Paris, where I was to reconduct Madame de Vernon, a very affecting letter from Madame d'Ervins. In this letter, she conjured me to go to a painter's at the Louvre, where M. de Serbellane's portrait was still left, and to bring it to her, to view it for the last time. I was persuaded last night,

night, says she, that his features were effaced from my memory; I looked for them, as it were, through mists placed between me and my recollection. I know well that it is a frantic chimera of my fancy, but I must endeavour to tranquillize my troubled mind, before the last sacrifice takes place. The indulgence which I still feel for my own weaknesses, shall not embarrass you much longer, my dear friend; for my resolution is fixed, and every object that appears to allure me from it, tends only to bring me nearer to my design.

I felt no reluctance in endeavouring to console Theresa, according to her own desire; and Madame de Vernon, to whom I communicated my sentiments about her, was entirely of my opinion.

I went therefore, this morning, to the Louvre; but, before I reached the residence of M. de Serbellane's painter, I stopped some time in the picture gallery. Among others, there was a painting exhibited,

hibited, which had just come from the hands of a young artist, and such was the impression made on me by the first view of it, that I burst immediately into a flood of tears. Of all the fine arts, you know that painting produces the least effect on my imagination; but the impression left upon my mind, by the present picture, was of that lively and affecting nature, which I had hitherto experienced from poetry and music only.

The* subject of this piece was, the return of Marcus Sextus to Rome, after the proscriptions of Sylla. On entering his house, he finds his wife stretched lifeless on her bed; and his young daughter, in the wildness of despair and grief, comes and throws herself at his feet. Marcus holds the pale and livid hand of his wife in his own; he hesitates to look

* This painting has been exhibited for three years in the gallery.

look on her face, through horror of the cruel expectation. His hair stands on end, he remains immoveable, but all his members are contracted with despair. The agitation of his soul consigns his body to a state of torpid inaction. The lamp is extinguished, the tripod which supports it is overturned. Every circumstance in the picture brings death before the eyes of the spectator; grief alone is the only expression of life in it.

While viewing this painting, I was affected with that profound pity, which fictions never raise in our hearts, unmixed with any consideration for ourselves; and I contemplated this scene of sorrow, with the same sensations I should have felt in the midst of a tempest, in viewing at a distance the floating fragments of a wreck.

I was extricated from my reverie by the arrival of a painter, who conducted me to his workshop. I saw M. de Serbellane's portrait, which was a most striking likeness.

ness. I desired it to be conveyed into my carriage; and while this was performing, I returned into the gallery to view once more the picture of Marcus Sextus.

On entering, I perceived Leonce before the picture, in the same situation that I had been myself, and appearing to be affected with its expressive representation. His presence deprived me, in an instant, of all power of reflexion, and I advanced towards him without knowing what I was about. He lifted up his eyes towards me, without seeming to be surprised at my sudden appearance. His soul was agitated before my approach; and it seemed to me, that his thoughts were turned on me in the moment of my arrival, and that his reflexions had already prepared him for my presence.

He addressed me with every appearance of disorder and distraction, and scarce deigned to turn his eyes on me: "This unhappy Roman," says he, "has been much pitied, who, on returning to his country, finds only the inanimate relics of the

the object of his tenderness. But how much more unhappy would he have been, had he been deceived by the woman that he adored, if he could no longer esteem her, nor even regret her loss without indignity to himself! When death has snatched away the woman that we love, death can unite us once more with her; our souls, in taking flight from our bosoms, seem to escape to the image of our adoration: but if the remembrance of her is accompanied with bitter recollections, if you cannot think of her without a mixture of love and indignation, if you suffer internally by a constant struggle of repugnant sentiments; what consolation will you find in the tomb? Alas! Madam, behold that unhappy man sinking under the load of his distresses; yet he has not experienced the most poignant of all afflictions: nature, inexhaustible in her resources, still spares him from the extremity of misery.—He holds, cried Leonce with an accent of bitter severity, and seizing my arm like a frantic person,

he

he holds in his hand the livid arm of the partner of his life; but the cruel hand of her who was so dear to him, had never plunged a poisoned dagger in his breast.

Terrified with his emotion, and being unable to divine the meaning of his words, I was desirous to answer him, to interrogate him, and to justify myself. In this instant, one of my servants was employed in carrying the portrait of M. de Serbellane; and the painter who followed him, ordered it to be placed, with all possible care, in Madame d'Albemar's carriage. Upon this, Leonce quitted me; and going to the portrait, lifts the cloth that covered it, throws it back with violence, and returning to me with the most insulting expression of countenance — "Pardon, Madam," said he, "the moments I have made you lose; I know not what was the cause of my emotion; but what is certain," added he, laying a stress on the word, with all the haughtiness of his soul, "what is certain, Madam, is, that I am perfectly at

ease at present." — Having pronounced these words, he drew his hat over his eyes, and immediately disappeared.

I remained confounded with this scene, and immoveable on the spot where Leonce had left me. I endeavoured to discover the meaning of the cutting reproaches which he vented against me; and the idea presented itself, from every word he said, and from the impression made on him by M. de Serbellane's picture, that jealousy was the real cause of his resentment. This supposition, perhaps in itself agreeable to me, appeared in a confused light to me, when Madame de Vernon arrived. I did not expect her; she had been at my house, not supposing me to have gone out, and being desirous to bring me with her to the painter's. In my first emotion, I expressed to her every idea that disturbed me, and I asked her, with great eagerness, how Leonce could imagine that I was in love with M. de Serbellane, as he knew so well the history of Madame d'Ervin?

Really

Really, replied she, he imagines no such thing. But you have no idea of his character, and irritability in every circumstance that concerns you.—This answer was far from satisfying me, and I looked with astonishment on Madame de Vernon. I do not know what passed in her mind on that occasion; but she was silent for some time, and replied to me afterwards with a firmness of tone, which made me blush for the thoughts which I had entertained, and proved to me too satisfactorily, that they were without any just foundation.

"I now discover," said Madame de Vernon to me, "the cause of that unjust diffidence that you have in me, which I can endure no longer, and must request of you to come to an explanation on the subject. I shall constrain Leonce, notwithstanding the motives that might restrain me from such a step, to explain to you himself, the reasons which have decided him not to unite himself with you. This is a proceeding, perhaps, somewhat in

 opposition

opposition to my duty as a mother, to bring you into company with my daughter's husband; for I am certain he can never see you without considerable emotion, whatever may be his opinion of your conduct: but I cannot endure your want of confidence in me; and in order to remove it, I shall write to-morrow to Leonce, to come to an interview with you."

Consider, my dear sister, the terror I felt at such a proposal. I conjured Madame de Vernon to relinquish it; she quitted me without acquainting me of her resolution, and I could perceive she felt herself hurt, nor could I draw a single word from her. I am now going to spend two days at Cernay, with Madame de Lebensei: if Madame de Vernon, in spite of my remonstrances, has so little consideration for me, as to ask Leonce to see me, he shall know, at least, that I have not consented to such a humiliation, nor shall he find me at home, nor at Paris, nor Bellerive.

LETTER IX.

MADAME DE VERNON TO LEONCE.

AFTER all I have told you, after all that has passed, the agitation you discovered yesterday morning in speaking to Madame d'Albemar, has much astonished her, my dear Leonce. She wishes not to depart till you are on good terms with each other: she thinks, and with reason, that as you are become near relations by your marriage with my daughter, you ought not to continue in a state of mutual rancour. I wish, therefore, that you should both meet together at my house to-morrow evening. Is it your desire to come?

LETTER X

LEONCE IN ANSWER TO THE PRECEDING.

I HAVE nothing to say to Madame d'Albemar, my dear Madam, which can induce me to seek the interview which you demand. We are, now, and we shall continue to be, perfect strangers to each other. Friendship, like love, should be founded on esteem; and when I am forced to renounce it, I hope you will dispense with the trouble of a formal declaration.

LETTER XI.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, August 14.

I HAVE offended her, mortally offended her, my dear friend; it was my wish to do so, and yet I repent of it with bitterness. But how comes it to pass, that on the very day on which I learned by accident from Madame de Vernon, that Madame d'Albemar was to go to M. de Serbellane's painter, on that day when I saw her take away the picture, Madame de Vernon makes a proposal to me, to meet Madam d'Albemar at her house? She requests me to bid her farewell, on her departure to rejoin M. de Serbellane! and in what terms does Madame de Vernon, inspired no doubt by Madame d'Albemar, endeavour to persuade me to this

measure? She brings to my recollection the ties of friendship and of family connections, which necessarily must bring me near her niece! No—I am neither the relation, nor the friend of Delphine; I hate her, or I adore her; there is no medium in this case, and nothing shall proceed according to common rules. I should not, certainly, have employed injurious expressions in my refusal to see her; so many circumstances, however, concurred at that time to irritate me against her, that I was not master of my discretion. For that day I was tolerably at my ease; but during the night, and the following day, I was not able to escape from the remorse which tormented me, for having cruelly insulted her, whom I have so tenderly loved. I went to Madame de Vernon's, to conjure her not to shew my answer to Madame d'Albemar. She had set off, they told me, about an hour before, for Madame de Lebensei's country house, and was still on the road. I had hopes of

of coming up with her, by getting on horseback, and I set out in an instant: I arrived at Cernay, without meeting Madame de Vernon; a servant went before me; the gate was opened—I entered, and the first object that struck my sight, was Madame d'Albemar's carriage, which was drawn up before the house door. I imagined that Madame d'Albemar was on the point of departing, and by an unaccountable contradiction of my heart, although I did not come with the intention of seeing her, yet I could not support the idea of the impossibility of such an event. Without design or reflexion, I advanced, and called to the coachman to draw back.—He told me, that he expected Madame d'Albemar, and waited her orders.—Draw back, said I, and at the same time I sprung to the ground with such fury, that he complied with my orders from fear. I was ashamed of my foolish passion, when I found myself in the middle of the yard, and exposed

posed to the observations of all the servants who were present. Madame d'Albemar's servant, recollecting the time when his mistress took a pleasure in seeing me, told me she was in the garden. I entered by the nearest door, still continuing in the same state of absence and distraction: I was in a strange house, where I knew not a single person; yet I proceeded where she was, like a wretch dragged on by a supernatural power. It was nine o'clock at night, the heavens were perfectly serene and clear, and the beauty of the scene would have soothed any heart but mine; but such was my agitation, that I was incapable of any pleasing impression. I endeavoured to find her, and my eyes revolted at every other object. I perceived from an eminence in the garden, across the shade of the surrounding trees, that charming figure which I am doomed never to forget; she was reclining on a monument, which she seemed to examine with attention; at her feet

feet was a little girl, dressed in black, who drew her by the gown, in order to fix her attention on herself. I approached without discovering myself. Delphine was raising her beautiful eyes to heaven, and I thought she appeared pale and trembling, such as I had before observed her at church: she was employed in prayer, and enthusiasm and inspiration were depicted on her countenance. The wind blew towards her, and ruffled the folds of her garment before it came to me. In breathing this air, I imagined that I was intoxicated with beholding her, and that the breeze wafted towards me a divine inspiration: I remained some moments in this situation; my oppressed heart had enjoyed no repose for a month past, and I then felt it beat with greater ease, and could have placed my hand on it without a painful sensation. I should have continued a long time in this state, had I not perceived Delphine going out of the arbour, in order to read by moon-light a letter which she

 held

held in her hand: it immediately occurred to me, that this was the letter which I had written to Madame de Vernon, and I conjectured, that the signs of sorrow which the features of Delphine exhibited, were occasioned by the uneasiness which I had given to her. I was unable to resist this idea: I went up precipitately to Madame d'Albemar; she turned round, and starting at the sight of me, she supported herself against a tree, being on the point of sinking to the ground. I recognized my letter, which she was still reading: I made a motion to snatch it from her hands, and tear it, when Delphine, recovering herself, advanced towards me, holding the letter in one hand, with the other lifted towards heaven.

I never beheld her so captivating as on this occasion, and struck with admiration, I considered myself the only culpable person: I seemed to hear the angels whom she invoked, speaking in her defence, and accusing me alone. I threw

myself

myself on my knees, before Heaven and before Delphine—before her beauty; and being no longer master of myself, I know not what I adored. Speak, cried I, speak, my Delphine: prostrate before you, I request you to justify yourself.—No, said she, placing her hand on her heart, my answer is here:—he who has been capable of insulting me, does not deserve to hear my defence. She withdrew from me—I conjured her to stay, but to no purpose.

Madame de Vernon appeared at a distance, coming hastily to us, with Madame de Lebensei. I made my last effort to obtain a word; it proved ineffectual, and my offended heart recovered its indignation, which the sight of Delphine had for a while suspended. I wished to appear calm in the presence of strangers, and not to make Delphine the witness of my dejection: I spoke with haste and confusion, and brought together, at hazard, every thing that I could say to Madame de Lebensei and Madame de Vernon; and

having thought that I had said enough to give myself an air of indifference and tranquillity, I then cast my eyes on Delphine, and viewed her at first with some assurance. She did not, like me, endeavour to hide her emotion; she was leaning on Madame d'Ervin's daughter; she walked with great difficulty, made no reply to any thing, and only directed her eyes towards the road that led out of the park. Seeing her sorrow and dejection, I remained silent, and followed her steps without saying a word. Madame de Vernon and Madame de Lebensei, strove in vain to support the conversation—at the moment we approached the gate, Madame d'Albemar cast her eyes on me: if I had only felt this glance, I believe my situation would not be deplorable;—but she has refused to justify her conduct. . . But senseless as I am! what defence could she have made? Will she disavow her choice? Has she not already deceived me, and can she do away the past? Why then have I wished

wished to see her, and why cannot I forget the expression of grief which was painted in her countenance? Is this another instance of perfidious artifice, of artifice in those looks and accents? and did she counterfeit the state in which I beheld her, when she was unconscious of my presence?

On her departure, her carriage passed before one of the walks of the park, and I stept behind the trees, to follow her still with my eyes. Madame d'Ervin's daughter had thrown her arms round her, and Delphine kept her pressed to her bosom, in a position so tender, and with such an affecting expression! I thought I could see her bosom heave with sobs and sighs. Could an artful, dissembling woman, thus press a child to her bosom? Could that bosom, at an age of truth and purity, be already associated with the artifices of falsehood? No.—She was affected by my presence! this sentiment I do not consider as a fiction of my imagination.—But she is at-

tached to M. de Serbellane; she could not deny that to me; it was what I naturally expected, and therefore I shall follow her no more. Before this interview, I had hopes, that if I should see her again, that instant would decide my fate: I have seen her! and my destiny is consigned to greater misery. What business had I at Madame de Lebensei's? Why was Madame d'Albemar there? It is a house which is disagreeable to me in every respect, and M. de Lebensei was absent, a circumstance which I did not regret. Has not M. de Lebensei allured a woman that he loved, to a step which has exposed her to universal censure? That she is unhappy, I have no doubt, notwithstanding her repeated assertions to the contrary: her secret uneasiness, her apparent ease, that mixture of timidity and pride, which makes her deportment so inconsistent; every circumstance, in fine, furnishes undoubted proof, that there is no braving public opinion, without suffering the cruel conse-

quences

quences of such a step. But, as for me, who respect opinion, who have never done any thing which I can be reproached with, am I more happy on that account? I can assure you, my dear friend, that there is not on earth a man so miserable.

From what cause is it, that, while you are writing to me with confidence and affection, you are silent on the subject of my sorrows, as if you dreaded to let me know, that you still love Madame d'Albemar. I agree with you in that respect, I am, perhaps, weak enough to desire it to be so; but I pray you, speak to me about her, and do not abandon me alone to the torment of my thoughts.

LETTER XII.

MADELLE D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, August 23.

FOR the first time in my life, my dear friend, I entirely disapprove of the sentiments which you express to me. What! Leonce, on refusing to see you, writes a formal letter to announce, that he has ceased to esteem you; and yet, in the very moment when such provoking conduct should inspire you with the utmost indignation, your * letter to me is filled with expressions of sorrow, for not having spoken to him, and for not attempting to justify yourself in his eyes! It may be said with reason of you, that you become

* This letter, and some others which are alluded to, are not to be found in this collection.

become weak, in proportion to his injustice: it is in vain to deceive yourself by assuring me, that it is not love, but pride, and the sentiment of wounded dignity, which will not suffer you to endure the thought that he should imagine himself entitled to shock your feelings by a public display of the bad opinion he entertains for you.

Do you desire to hear the truth? I must tell you, that Leonce's letter gives you more uneasiness than any other circumstance, and you have no longer the power to submit yourself to your lot. This is not all: by seeing this terrible Leonce again, your sentiments of attachment to him are revived; and perhaps (pardon the expression) he is necessary to enable you to understand yourself, or you may have perceived that he felt a deep emotion in your presence, and that a longer conversation might place him at your feet. Pardon me once more, but let me suggest to you, that

the impressions made on your heart, are not accurately known to yourself; but still reflect on the irreparable injury you will inflict, by exciting a passion in the breast of Leonce, which will inevitably inspire him with an aversion for Matilda.—

My dear Delphine, do you remember the sentiment you repeated so often in your conversations with my brother; that goodness of heart was the source of every other virtue; and that a being who had never done an injury to any person, was exempt from every fault before the tribunal of conscience? I firmly believe with you, that the true revelation of natural morals, exists in the sympathy which we feel for the sufferings of others. And will you, my dear Delphine, bid defiance to this sentiment? I shall not reason with you concerning your duties: I shall only say:—Think of Matilda; she is only eighteen years of age, and she has confided her happiness and her life

life to Leonce. Will you abuse the charms which nature has bestowed on you, in order to ravish from her that heart which God and the laws of society have assigned her for her support? I know you wish it not: but how many dangers encompass you in your present situation, if you have not the courage to quit Paris, and come to reside with me!

It gives me some uneasiness to reflect that this Madame de Vernon, whose conduct is so complicated, though her conversation is so simple, is the only perſon who has any influence over you at Paris. Why do you make no return to the zealous attachment of Madame d'Artenas to to you, since you have done an essential service for her niece Madame de R.? She has written several times to me to testify her desire of forming a cloſer intimacy with you: I know that when she came to see us at Montpellier, on her return from Barège,

Barège, you would not permit me to compare her with Madame de Vernon. Undoubtedly she is less agreeable; she does not possess that appearance of sensibility, that gentleneſs in conversation, and that air of reverie in her silence, which charm you so much in Madame de Vernon: but her character is much more natural; she has a perfect knowledge of the world, and I confeſs that she sets too much value on it; and if she had not really a great deal of sense, the importance which ſhe assigns to every thing that is said at Paris, might pass with me for *mere gossiping.* However, nobody gives better advice; and whether it be virtue or reason, she is invariably on the side of rectitude. Do not refuse to listen to her advice; you will not speak to her, I am sensible, on the subjects which are better adapted to youthful years; but in other respects, she will give you wholesome counsels, while Madame de Vernon,

non, who only seeks to please you, has never your real interest at heart. I conjure you also, my dear Delphine, to conceal nothing from me that passes in your heart, or in the daily occurrences of your life: you evidently require support to enable you to keep up your noble resolution of departing. Believe me on this occasion, when I say, that, if passion did not perplex you, no being on the earth could be so presumptuous as to compare their reason with yours: but you love Leonce, and I love only you; give yourself up then without reserve to my tenderness, and be guided entirely by it.

LETTER XIII.

MADAME D'ARTENAS TO MADAME DE R***

Paris, September 1, 1790.

RETURN once more to Paris, my dear niece: you have shewn too strong an inclination for solitude this year: since that unfortunate scene at the Thuileries, you are melancholy: I am desirous that you should feel a little the necessity of following my counsels, but I should be sorry you should lose the gaiety so natural to your character.

I have, at last, found an opportunity of seeing Madame d'Albemar, whom you desired me to call on; and I should certainly have sought an acquaintance with her, on my own account, I found her so amiable and excellent. It was my wish that she should speak to me with confidence, on her actual

actual situation; but Madame de Vernon has entire possession of her friendship, and I doubt whether she makes a good use of her influence. I found Madame d'Albemar overwhelmed with sorrow, and in violent agitation: she had every appearance of a person labouring under a cruel indecision: it was nine o'clock at night: she was still in her morning dress—her beautiful hair in disorder; and by the neglect of personal decoration, by her slow step, and the dejection of her aspect, she gave every indication of being entirely occupied by the same thought, and of suffering from the same cause of grief.

In such a state, however, she was as beautiful as the day, and I could not help telling her so. Me beautiful! said she: I must no longer consider myself to be so.

She remained silent for some time, and I was desirous of learning from her, how matters were at present with respect to her and M. de Serbellane. There is a variety of reports on the subject at Paris: some

say,

say, she goes to Languedoc for no other purpose than to rejoin M. de Serbellane, if he cannot obtain permission to return to France, on account of his duel. Others whisper, that Madame d'Albemar has been very coquetish to M. de Mondoville, and that M. de Serbellane was offended, and had quarrelled with her. To conclude, a letter from Bordeaux gave rise to a very different idea in my mind, which I have hitherto kept concealed from the world. I was of opinion, that M. de Serbellane was the lover of Madame d'Ervins, and that Madame d'Albemar having, rather indiscreetly, brought them together at her house, M. d'Ervins had surprised them there, and fought a duel with M. de Serbellane to avenge himself for the infidelity of his wife.

I attempted to engage the confidence of Madame d'Albemar, by telling her the truth; which was, that I saw with uneasiness that the different reports concerning her, that circulated in Paris, might be prejudicial

judicial to her reputation. She replied to me in such discouraging terms, that I felt myself considerably affected. There was a period in my life, said she, in which I should have attached some importance to what was said respecting me; but now that my name is not to be united with that of any other person, I give myself no uneasiness for the injustice that may be done to my reputation. These words convinced me, that she had really had some difference with M. de Serbellane; and as I began to give her some consolation on the anxiety which such an event must cause to her, she stopped me, to demand an explanation: when I had explained my sentiments, she seemed rather surprised; but, without laying any stress on that circumstance, she declared to me, that she had never any intention of marrying M. de Serbellane.

The suspicion I entertained respecting Madame d'Ervins immediately occurred to me, and I made it known to Delphine; declaring to her, that, in the present case,

 I looked

I looked upon Madame d'Ervins as the real cause of her husband's death. Delphine no sooner heard me, than she recovered herself from the state of dejection, in which I had hitherto seen her, and protested to me, that I was mistaken. I persisted in my opinion, and I told her positively, that so desperate a duel could never have been occasioned by mere political discussions; and that M. de Serbellane's passion for her, or Madame d'Ervins, must have been the true cause of it. When Madame d'Albemar saw that this idea was confirmed in my mind, she ceased to contradict any opinion that I formed respecting her attachment for M. de Serbellane, requesting only that I should not accuse Madame d'Ervins.

What shall I say to you, my dear niece, on this subject? It was impossible for me to develope the truth. It is not, assuredly, that Madame d'Albemar is not the most frank and candid woman that I have ever known; but still, there is such a singular

generosity

generosity in her disposition, that I have not been enabled to discover, with certainty, whether the whole mystery of the business does not rest on the fears which she entertains of committing Madame d'Ervins. Does she really love M. de Serbellane? Does her sorrow proceed from their separation, or perhaps from their falling out? Or does she, in fact, give way to every thing which can be said of herself and him, to turn off the attention which might be directed towards Madame d'Ervins, and to save her from the indignation which might be excited in the public, and in her husband's family? I am in the dark about this circumstance, and I request of you the most profound secrecy on this last supposition: you must be sensible of its consequences.

Whatever may be the case, Madame d'Albemar has rendered all my penetration useless; yet I glory in unmasking the characters of the dissembling; but when a frank and candid soul desires to conceal a

 secret,

secret, its simple and natural reserve eludes all the efforts of the most experienced and judicious minds.

After some moments of silence, I insisted no longer on these topics; and, confining myself to the task of endeavouring to open Delphine's eyes, respecting Madame de Vernon's real character, I thus addressed her :—" Whatever may be your motives for not providing those who take an interest in your happiness, with the means of completely refuting the malicious insinuations of your enemies, yet true friends can easily silence, when they please, the slanderous tongues of the Parisians. Why, therefore, does not Madame de Vernon, who calls herself your friend, impose silence on the phalanx of fools who attack your reputation? It is true, that distinguished personages are the first objects of their attacks; but they will not make the attempt, unless in those moments when they see them weakly defended by their relations or their friends.

" I have

"I have reason to believe," replied Delphine, sinking again into that state of unsociable melancholy, from which she had escaped for some time, "I have reason to consider Madame de Vernon as my friend. "I have not heard it reported," said I, "that she allows herself any sort of censure on your conduct, my dear Delphine: still I have little confidence in her friendship. Her nearest intimates seem ill inclined towards you; and this is almost an infallible indication. People communicate to their nearest friends their real sentiments; and, in her own circle, a woman will procure esteem for another whom she esteems. She praises you considerably, I must own, but it is aloud, and in a manner that displays her wishes that you may hear it repeated to you; but she does not discover, when you are the topic, that conciliating talent which she manifests on other subjects. She frequently says, that you are very beautiful, and very sensible; but it is to women she addresses this eulogium, for the purpose of

 humbling

humbling their vanity. She never says a word of the goodness of your heart, of your gentleness, and that affecting sensibility, which forces those women, who are jealous of your charms, to pardon the superiority you possess above them. Permit me, likewise, to tell you, that she commends you with cold indifference, as she would perform a task in which she took no pleasure; and having, as it were, a presentiment that your friendship may terminate on some future day, she shuns, at all hazards, presenting you with weapons against herself, by contributing to establish your reputation."

"If you see these matters in the true light," replied Delphine, "I am only the more miserable on that account. I have always loved, and still love Madame de Vernon, with the most ardent affection; and, if so much attachment and esteem have not conciliated her attachment for me, it is then true, that there is nothing in me which can secure affection; and it follows, that I

am

am not deserving of any love." "My dear Delphine," said I, with some warmth, "you deserve to have friends more than any person in the world; but you are not, as yet, sufficiently acquainted with life. You imagine you have two excellent guides in the goodness of your heart, and your understanding; but it is not sufficient to be amiable and excellent, in order to extricate one's self, successfully, from the difficulties of the world. There are faults which are serviceable—such as coldness and mistrust, which would shield you better than your fine qualities; and even those fine qualities must be under the direction of a powerful reason. As for myself, as I am not naturally very susceptible of sympathy, I acquired a quick insight into the world; and I request of you to let me communicate my knowledge to you. Madame de Vernon appears to you more worthy of your friendship; she knows better to hold that seducing language to you, which captivates your mind: but I am always the same; I have

have not imagination enough to assume fictitious sentiments, even were it my desire to do so. I am not now young; my mind is no longer flexible, and it can only move in its usual track; but I know that my advice is necessary for you; and it is with this conviction I solicit your confidence. You have been told, I believe, that I am not apt to put myself forward; I am on the defensive with the world; and so ought every one to be: yet I offer myself to you, my dear Delphine, because you are of a temper that concedes every thing, and abuses nothing. Command my services: if I can be useful to you in any respect, it will be the best employment for my idle existence."

Madame d'Albemar appeared much affected with these proofs of friendship, and I flattered myself that I had somewhat weakened the force of her blind attachment to Madame de Vernon; but the following day she returned my visit, as it were, solely to acquaint me, that she had seen Madame de

de Vernon after she quitted me, and was now perfectly assured that Madame de Vernon had done no wrong. "She could not well plead my cause," continued Madame d'Albemar, "without committing my friends: she has acted well, in conducting herself with prudence, and not giving way to feeling and sentiment." I must repeat, my dear niece, that it is impossible to deliver Madame d'Albemar from the influence of Madame de Vernon.

I have often remarked, during my intercourse with them, what pains Madame de Vernon takes to engage the affections of Delphine; she is at once sublime, tender and delicate, with her. She pays her homage to the character of her friend, by imitating every virtue for her sake. As for me, I neither can nor will exhibit myself in any other shape than nature has formed me, that is, affectionate and reasonable, but without any flights of fancy. I am really of more intrinsic value than Madame

de Vernon; and Delphine does me injustice in not perceiving it. I hope, nevertheless, one day to obtain Madame d'Albemar's friendship, if any circumstances put it in my power to serve her; I promise you, that I shall watch over her as my own daughter; and you also, my dear niece, you are to be the object of my tender cares, if you continue to listen to my advice, and be directed in your conduct by my instructions.

H. D'ARTENAS.

LETTER XIV.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, Sept. 3.

NO—it is vain to exact it from me; I have not power to endure so painful an uncertainty.

certainty. Let him tell me his sentiments; let me know the cause of the extraordinary state in which I find him, and then I will submit to my unhappy fate. But doubt, and uncertainty! that cruel suspense which assumes every form to pursue you, without having a weapon to defend yourself from its attacks, I cannot bring myself to endure it. Those unhappy persons who are condemned to punishment, know at least the crimes for which they suffer; but I am denied this consolation. What appeared to me to be the cause, has no longer any plausibility to induce me to credit it. I will tell you what passed yesterday, and then, if you can, continue to command me to depart without seeing him.

Tancred was the play yesterday, and Madam de Vernon proposed to me to go. I consented, because, of all tragedies, it is that which causes me to weep the most. We sat in Madame de Ver-

non's box, which is below, near the orchestra.

During the first act, I remarked, at some distance from us, a man who was wrapt up in a cloak, with his head reclined on the foremost seat; he covered his face with his hands, and took every caution to conceal himself. Notwithstanding his efforts, I found him to be Leonce; for there is so much dignity in his figure, that it is impossible to disguise it.

My eyes were fixed on him alone; I could not listen to a word of the piece, but continued still to keep him in my sight. He started at the scene where Tancred becomes acquainted with the infidelity of Amenaïde: his emotion, from that instant, continued to increase, and he endeavoured to escape from all observation; but in vain, for my eyes pursued him. Alas! how much I wished to approach him! and how was I not affected with his tears! They were the first I ever

saw shed, by a man so firm and collected; but was it on my account that he wept? Was it possible that he should suffer such agitation, if Matilda could make him happy? Were not his sorrows dedicated to her who understands much better the sentiments of Amenaïde, and who is more worthy to admire, with him, the language which genius lends to love?

At the fourth act he appeared to me to have no longer any power to restrain his feelings. I faw his visage bathed in tears, and I remarked an air of extreme sorrow and anguish over his whole person, which alarmed me considerably. I believe, that in my concern for him, I made some motion which he observed; for at that very instant he lowered himself in his seat, in order to escape from my observation. But when Tancred, after having fought and triumphed for Amenaide, returns home with a resolution to die; when a melancholy recollection, the last regret for the loss of love and life, inspires

inspires him with these verses, the most affecting that can be conceived:

*Quel charme, dans son crime, à mes esprits rappelle**
L'image des vertus que je crus voir en elle!

"What charm, even in her crimes, recalls to my mind the image of the virtues which I thought she possessed!"

a sigh, a half-stifled groan, issued from the heart of Leonce: every eye was turned on him; he rose with precipitation, and immediately left the house: he faltered in his steps, as he went along, and stopped some

* Lines of TANCRED, Act IV. Scene II.

Quel charme, dans son crime, à mes esprits rappelle
L'image des vertus que je crus voir en elle!
Toi qui me fais descendre avec tant de tourment
Dans l'horreur du tombeau, dont je t'ai délivrée,
Odieuse coupable!—et peut-être adorée!
Toi qui fais mon destin, jusqu'au dernier moment!
Ah! s'il étoit possible, ah! si tu pouvois être
Ce que mes yeux trompés t'ont vu toujours paroître!
Non, ce n'est qu'en mourant que je peux l'oublier!

What

some time to support himself. His face seemed overspread with a deadly paleness, and as the door was shutting after him, I thought I saw him fall to the ground, through want of strength to support his steps.

Alas! what prevented me from following him? The presence of Madame de Vernon, which fixed my attention, and the curiosity of the spectators, which must have been excited by such a circumstance, restrained me from the attempt. But I never experienced a sympathy more ardent for

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What charm, even in her crimes, recalls to my mind the image of the virtues which I thought she possessed! O thou! who deliverest me, in the midst of torments, to the gloomy horrors of the tomb, from which I have rescued thee, thou odious and guilty creature, and yet still perhaps adored! thou commandest my destiny, even to the verge of life! Alas! were it still possible that thou mightest be, what my deluded eyes have painted to my fancy! But no—it is in death alone I shall be able to forget thee!

for Leonce: it was sufficient for me, to find him still endowed with sensibility, without recollecting that it was not now for my ſake, and that he had voluntarily formed that connexion which must separate us for ever. I returned home with haste, and finding myself alone, I began to reflect with deep meditation on the strange circumstance that had taken place. I imagined that I perceived some connexion between the lines that made such an impression on Leonce, and the sentiments which he would naturally feel, if he loved me still, and considered me in a guilty light. But still, however extravagant he may be with respect to worldly virtues, he cannot reasonably apply the name of Guilty to the conduct which I had adopted. No — said I with vehemence, I have been calumniated to him, though I know not in what manner: I must therefore be heard in my defence: I must justify myself to him at all hazards. No sense of duty whatsoever, my dear Louisa,

Louisa, shall induce me to consent that he shall form an unjust opinion of me: let me die, so that he regrets my loss; but let me not be required to live, if I am to live with his contempt.

When I recollect, however, the letter which he has answered, the thought of writing to him, and desiring to see him, makes me ready to die with shame. Whatever may happen, Madame de Vernon shall not be the confidante of my present thoughts; I know not what she may say, or what secret opinion she may entertain: it is the voice of Leonce alone that can persuade me now: from him alone I shall learn, whether he loves me or hates me, whether he is unhappy or unjust. It is to him....... What then! shall I bid defiance to every sentiment of reserve, ſhall I go to implore an explanation from a character so suspicious, so rigid, and so haughty? Alas! what a cruel perplexity! How shall I ever be able to extricate myself?

Tell

Tell me not that all is over, that he is married, and that I must renounce his good opinion as well as his love. His esteem is still the only blessing I possess on earth: he wishes to unite the suffrages of all in his favour; I only want his suffrage, and I must carry it with me into my retreat. If I do not obtain it, I shall be ever a prey to restless agitation: I shall not even possess the repose which misery itself may give, when there is nothing further to be done, or nothing more to be hoped. I shall never be resigned to my lot, and with my expiring breath, my last word shall be an attempt to justify myself to Leonce.

LETTER XV.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Sept. 4, 1790.

I SEND you a messenger, who has orders to return in twenty-four hours, with a letter from you. You have sent me no answer this week past to the letters which I have written to you on the subject of what passed between Madame d'Albemar and myself. What is the motive of your silence? Why have you not answered my letters? Do you think me unjust to Delphine? and if you think me so, do you imagine that telling me of it would do me any injury?

LETTER XVI.

M. BARTON IN REPLY TO LEONCE.

Mondoville, Sept. 6.

YOU do wrong in attaching so much importance to a silence of a few days; I suffer continually from my arm, and I find it painful to write until I am perfectly cured.

You are the husband of Mademoiselle de Vernon, who is a very virtuous person, and wonderfully attached to you: I think, therefore, you should no longer keep in memory the circumstances that preceded your marriage. I cannot minutely examine matters at a distance; what you have told me is not sufficient to enable me to form a judgment on a woman to whom I have vowed attachment and esteem; but what I am perfectly certain of, is, that even she at present wishes you to be occupied

occupied with your own welfare, and that of Matilda; and that you should entirely forget the affection you might reasonably have felt for each other, when you were both at liberty.

I conjure you, my dear Leonce, to tranquillize your mind on this subject. The time is past for the object you desired; your destiny is irrevocably fixed, and so is your duty as a man. Call to mind what your own constant opinions were on the nature of the ties which you have contracted, and reflect on the necessity of submitting, when passion blinds us, to the judgment which we pronounce in the calm moments of reason. I am sorry that I am not in a state fit to travel; I might hope that our conversations together might be serviceable to you. Adieu.

LETTER XVII.

MADAME DE R*** TO MADAME D'ARTENAS.

Sept. 14.

I ARRIVED, two days ago, to see you, my dear aunt, and was told at your house that you were in the country: you ought to have informed me of this circumstance, as I returned to Paris for the express purpose of seeing you. When I find you alone, I shall explain to you my opinion on retirement; and you will encourage me to speak to you on this subject, however painful it may be to me.

I began by enquiring about Madame d'Albemar, but I do not wish to call on her myself. Alas! I am but too sensible, that her connexion with me will be injurious to her; however, my heart entertains no sentiment more lively, than the interest which I feel in her fate. Madame de

de Vernon invited me yesterday to a grand assembly at her house, and I went there with the hopes of meeting Madame d'Albemar, who did not come. On crossing Madame de Vernon's apartments, I recollected the last time I came there, on the day of the grand-ball, in which Delphine excited so much admiration, and manifested so visibly her attachment to M. de Mondoville. I was reflecting on the unexpected events which took place after that day, when M. de Mondoville entered the room with his wife.

I have told you, I believe, my dear aunt, that the first time I saw Léonce, I was so struck with the beauty and majesty of his aspect, that the sudden impression which I experienced made me reflect with bitterness on the misfortunes of my life. I thought myself unworthy of engaging the attention of such a man, and Madame d'Albemar seemed to be the only woman who deserved his notice. But, yesterday, the expression of his countenance was entirely

tirely altered: the beauty of his features still remained; but his gloomy and wandering looks were fixed on no woman in the room. He paid his addresses to the company in a hasty manner, and went and sat in a retired corner of the apartment, where he had nobody to speak to. Madame de Mondoville went up to him; I do not know what she said, but he answered her in a mild tone; and when she quitted him, he sighed as if labouring under secret uneasiness and constraint.

Madame de Vernon, at one time, wished to introduce her son-in-law to a strange lady who was unacquainted with him: I thought I could perceive in the deportment of Leonce, a secret repugnance to be presented as a newly-married man. He kept behind, and followed with reluctance, and answered rather aukwardly to any thing that resembled congratulations.

Madame du Marset, who was placed at my side, perceived that I remarked attentively both M. and Madame de Mondoville,

doville, and, smiling, said to me in a whisper: "I have paid the new-married couple a visit twice or thrice, and have seen them several times at Madame de Vernon's. There is nothing so singular as the conduct of Leonce: I think he wishes to be, acccording to the expression of the Duc de B—, *as little married as possible.* He avoids, with extraordinary care, the society, and even the ordinary occupations of his wife. Matilda, charmed with his mildness, his politeness, and the freedom he allows her, does not perceive his indifference for her, and the dread he has of drawing closer the ties which unite them, by making use of the privileges of his state. She really loves her husband, and is firmly persuaded of his affection; for these devotees have a wonderful faculty of believing! Leonce appears to be in constant expectation of some extraordinary event, and is only now and then to be seen in his house. He makes no domestic arrangements; he has not even opened his

 chest

chest of books: no part of his furniture is in its proper place. These are trifling observations, but they do not prove the less the state of his mind. Every circumstance that reminds him of his situation is painful to him; and, though unable to alter it, he avoids as much as possible those daily occurrences which represent to him the greatest misfortue of his life, that is, his marriage: in short, I can assure you, that he is a most unhappy man."

I was going to reply to Madame de Vernon, and to question her still more, but our conversation was immediately interrupted. As there was a number of young persons in the room, a dance was proposed. One lady went to the harpsichord, another took up the harp. I fixed my eyes on Leonce, who was seeking some pretext to leave the room; but he was detained, unmercifully, by an old man who was conversing with him. I could see that a dance would revive painful sensations in Leonce's heart; and I hoped no one would propose

it

it to him, when Madame du Marset took Matilda's hand, and, placing it in Leonce's, said to them both:—" Come, young married folks, let us see you dance together." "Bravo!" resounded from every side: " let us see them dance." The music strikes up, and the company draws back, to make room, and leaves Leonce and Matilda together in the middle of the apartment.

All this passed so rapidly, and Leonce was so absorbed in thought, that he did not, at first, discover the intention of the company: but when he heard the music, and saw the circle formed round him, and Matilda preparing herself to dance, being seized, as it were, with a sentiment of terror, and struck with the recollection of Delphine, which every circumstance tended to revive in him, he threw back Matilda's hand with violence, retired a few steps from her, and, suddenly returning, left the room in an instant, and flung himself into the garden. The circle which surrounded him opened, suddenly, to let him pass; and such was the impression

impression made by the violence of his action, that nobody had an idea of saying a word, to request of him to stop.

Madame de Vernon, perceiving the astonishment of the company, took the first opportunity to tell them, that M. de Mondoville could not bear to be the object of general attention, and that he was very timid, notwithstanding the good grounds he might have to be otherwise. Every person appeared to believe what she said; and, strange as it is, Matilda, who certainly loves her husband, was the first to be completely at her ease, and began to dance on the spot where Leonce had so suddenly quitted her.

I went out to take the air, and, at the end of the garden, I found Leonce sitting on a bench, in profound meditation. He saw me at the moment that I turned aside, in order not to disturb him; and he, who never till this time had addressed a word to me, came up to me, and spoke to me thus: "Madame de R***, the last time I had the

pleasure

pleasure of seeing you, you were in company with Madame d'Albemar: do you recollect the circumstance?" "Yes, certainly," replied I, "and I shall never forget it." "Well, then," said he, "sit down on this bench with me, if it will not be disagreeable to you to leave the ball." I repeated several times to him, that it would be no trouble to me: yet, when we were seated together, he remained silent, and seemed not to recollect that he had desired to speak to me. I felt an embarrassment which was rather painful to me, and was in a hurry to extricate myself from it, in my old wild and coquetish manner; for it is a piece of coquetry, to speak to a man about his attachment, even for another woman.—"What then has happened to you," said I, "during my absence? I thought that Madame d'Albemar loved you, and that you returned her affection: on my return, after a month's absence in the country, every thing is changed. A cruel accident makes a dreadful noise in the world—Madame

Madame d'Albemar, according to report, was to marry M. de Serbellane: I find you the husband of Matilda, and still you are in sorrow; Madame d'Albemar does not depart, nor does she see any person. What can be the reason of this apparent mystery?" Leonce reassumed that air of reserve which he had for a moment discarded, and said to me, with great indifference:—"Madame d'Albemar will be very happy in the choice which she has made of M. de Serbellane."—"Nobody shall put it out of my mind," replied I, "that she prefers you before all the world; but it is of no service to talk about it now, as you are married: so farewell." I rose to go away, but Leonce held me by the gown, and said:—"You are a very good-hearted creature, Madame de R***, although you have a little levity; but if you do not wish to make me uneasy, explain yourself a little more." "I know nothing about these matters, I assure you," said I; "I only recollect having seen Madame d'Albemar cross the ball-room the night

night you were taken ill, after having danced with her. The emotion she betrayed on that occasion could only proceed from a true, a pure, and devoted attachment; such as is experienced, added I, with a sigh, when the heart is not become insensible, after a continued succession of vain illusions. It is possible she may have had prior engagements with M. de Serbellane; but I am convinced that she will never marry him, because she loves you only, and has broken off her acquaintance with him entirely on your account."

Leonce seemed to be struck with what I told him; and Madame de Vernon coming to rejoin us, I entered the ball-room, and said nothing further to M. de Mondoville that night, unless at the moment of my departure, when he had finished a long conversation with his mother-in-law.

"Do not listen too much to Madame de Vernon," said I to him, in a low voice; "I distrust her very much, even in her friendship for Madame d'Albemar. She is very

 politic

politic and profound: she is not much troubled with devotion: she has no fixed principles of any kind, and has a great capacity and understanding. She never loved her husband, and yet was never known to have had a lover. Be diffident of such characters as these: they must employ their activity in some manner or another. Believe me, such poor creatures as myself, who have done ourselves only injury, have never been employed in procuring mischief to others."—"Alas!" replied Leonce, in giving me his hand to conduct me to my carriage, "there is probably a life, whose destiny will be decided by the words you have spoken with so much gaiety and unconcern."

Madame de Mondoville departed at the same time with me: she expressed her displeasure, in a very visible manner, at the politeness shewn to me by Leonce. It was not jealousy that troubled her: your poor niece will never be remarked for attracting Leonce's attention; but Madame de

de Mondoville, before her marriage as well as since, has never failed to exercise towards me the full rigour of her prudery. I deserve it, perhaps; but how much better does not the charming Delphine, as pure as Matilda, and a thousand times more amiable, understand the art of making virtue beloved!

Farewell, my dear aunt; return, I beseech you, soon: I can promise you, with certainty, that henceforth I shall dedicate my days entirely to your happiness.

CECILIA DE R.

LETTER XVIII.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Paris, September 15.

I HAVE at last determined, my dear master, on the resolution which I mean to adopt: I shall see Madame d'Albemar before I depart for Spain. A woman whom, during the happy period of my life, I should not have permitted to pronounce the name of Delphine, Madame de R***, has explained to me, I think, the contradictions which astonished in the character of Madame d'Albemar. Before my arrival, she had contracted some engagements with M. de Serbellane; but, it is true that she loved me afterwards; and perhaps this idea had offended M. de Serbellane, and that they are now on bad terms together. Her stay at Bellerive, her

her anxiety and embarrassment on seeing me, and every circumstance, may be explained, if in reality she reproaches herself for not having been sufficiently frank with me.

Yet I can no longer feel that boundless enthusiasm for her, which represented her to me as a sublime creature; but is it not clear, if she has sacrificed her engagements with M. de Serbellane to her attachment to me, that I still entertain a profound regard for her? However.....did she not know me, when her lover passed twenty-four hours in her house? Oh! infernal thought! Let me discard it, if possible. I wish to see Delphine again, that fallen angel, that still retains some remnant of her origin.

I must, moreover, make some excuses to her, before I quit her for ever: she was grieved, perhaps, when she discovered that I was the husband of Matilda. It was a very abrupt action for me to marry, and to break with her, without letting her know a single word about my design.

Madame de Vernon pressed me again, very strongly, yesterday, to go to Spain: she fears, I believe, I may reproach her with her continual losses at play. Her uneasiness is ill-founded: this is the time to have disputes with me: I recollect nothing, and am insensible to every thing that passes. But why did Madame de Vernon never tell me, that Delphine loved me, and wished, for my sake, to break off with her former choice? Was Madame de Vernon afraid that I should consent to replace M. de Serbellane, after all that had passed? That was knowing me but little! Still she ought to have furnished me with a sentiment of comfort, when I was irritated and devoured with misery and anguish; when a single word to allay my passions, would have been more acceptable to me, than a drop of water in the midst of deserts.

The consolation which I require, I shall, perhaps, find in a few hours conversation with Madame d'Albemar. I am therefore resolved

resolved to write to her, to request her to receive me at Bellerive. It is not at Paris, it is in a place of solitude and retirement I wish to speak with her: she will return to Bellerive to-morrow, and my letter will reach her the day after, as soon as she is up.

You have no reason to be alarmed, my dear master, for my fortitude, on the occasion of this explanation. I may learn that Delphine still loves me, and yet my resolutions shall not be altered. She can no longer show herself in the light I first viewed her, and the idea of perfection which I attached to her, could alone decide my fate. If, as I have reason to hope, Madame d'Albemar consents to receive me, and discovers much sorrow for the loss of me, I shall be able to trace a plan of life for myself, which shall be sorrowful, but calm. I shall depart for Spain, and stay there some years, though Madame de Mondoville may go with me. I must quit France, after seeing Madame d'Albemar;

d'Albemar; we shall separate without reproaches—I shall be resigned to my lot; my sorrows will not terminate: but do not the generality of mankind pass their lives with a painful sensation rankling in their hearts?

Blame me not, I say once more, blame me not: people of violent passions ought to be allowed to seek some new arrangement of mind and temper, which may render their existence tolerable. Do you imagine that I can live much longer in the state I have been for these two months past? I must have some other impression, even if it be grief, I must have it! You know I possess energy and firmness; I know how to suffer, and I must now inform you, that I was on the point of sinking under the weight of my miseries; and this cry for mercy escapes from me, only after the most violent struggles, that character and sentiment, reason and patience, had ever to encounter.

LETTER

LETTER XIX*.

M. DE SERBELLANE TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Lisbon, Sept. 4, 1790.

I TAKE the liberty to request of you, Madam, the most important service you can do me, and the only one which can avert the irreparable evils with which I am threatened.

Theresa, having decided on the future destination of her daughter, when she was passing some months on her estate, in the neighbourhood of Bourdeaux, is desirous of obtaining from her husband's family permission to confide the education of Isore to you; and having settled her mind in

* This letter was sent the 16th of September, in the evening, to Madame d'Albemar.

in peace, with respect to the destiny of the child, she is determined to become a nun, and to take the veil in a convent, of which father Antonio, her present confessor, has the direction. Thus shall the most excellent and amiable creature that Heaven ever formed, be dead to the world, and to me? Could the God whom Theresa adores be a God of clemency and compasson, if he should impose so heavy a punishment on her?

The barbarous customs of civilised society made Theresa the wife of a man unworthy of her, at the early age of fourteen. Nature, by giving birth to M. d'Ervins, twenty-five years before Theresa, seemed to have intended that they should not be united together; but the odious calculations of a cold-hearted family have bound them together, and Theresa would be considered criminal, had she chosen me for her companion through life.

It is impossible for her, I must own, to assume the title of my wife, and to appear

as such in the world at large: public morals must be respected, which forbid a proceeding of this nature; and though this species of morality be often inconsistent, both in the austerities it imposes, and the indulgences it allows, yet she must not bid defiance to it, as it approaches to the nature of some virtues in the opinion of its most steady votaries. But still, what sense of duty or morality can prevent Theresa from changing her name, and going to America with me, to be married to me there, and established for life? You will consider this project somewhat romantic, and rather contradictory to my usual habits and character; however, I consider it the offspring of mature reflection, and as inspired by a sentiment of perfect honour. Having, unguardedly, caused the misery of an innocent person, I ought to consecrate my life to her, as far as my life can contribute, in any degree, to her happiness. Moreover, as the disposition of my soul renders me little

capable

capable of very lively passions, it tends also to make my sacrifices lighter to me. Europe, as well as America, in short, all countries in the world, are equal to me. When one has acquired a thorough knowledge of mankind, it is impossible to feel a very strong sentiment of preference for any one particular nation before others; and the habit which gives rise to such a preference, no longer exists in me, as I have been constantly employed in travelling. Perhaps, also, it is not a disagreeable sensation, when remorse does not pursue us, to break through the relations which length of time makes us contract with society; to extricate ourselves from that multitude of painful recollections which distress the soul, and often stifle its most generous emotions. I shall replace myself in the midst of nature, with an amiable being, who shall participate all my impressions. I shall experience on earth, what forms, perhaps, the best idea of a future state; that is, oblivion of every thing, except sympathy and virtue.

Theresa is much more worthy of the destiny which I propose to her, than any other woman on earth. By shutting herself up in a convent, for the rest of her days, she discovers more courage to face misery, than I require of her to obtain her happiness: a principle of duty, fortified by religion, can alone, I am certain, determine her to sacrifice herself in such a manner; but what is the nature of this duty, and to what sort of atonement is she bound? What benefit can result to the living, or the dead, from the misery she wishes to endure? If she imagines she has done wrong, why not repair her supposed errors, by active virtues? We can employ in America the fortune I possess, in useful establishments, and acts of an enlightened benevolence. That Theresa will not fulfil the duties mankind have imposed on her, I will allow; but those which she herself has chosen, those which her heart allows her to perform, to those she will continue inflexible.

I am

I am determined to see her; it is the only method which I have left, to induce her to renounce her cruel resolution. I am persuaded every other attempt will be ineffectual: my letters have produced no effect; the spectacle of my sorrow only can affect her heart. Obtain for me, Madam, I entreat you, a safe-conduct for fifteen days in France. The Tuscan Envoy will demand it, if you desire him: I had intentions of returning without these wretched precautions; but, on Theresa's account, I was alarmed for the noise my imprisonment would occasion, if M. d'Ervins's family should obtain an order for it. I think the intention of this family is to persecute Theresa, but such a motive would never engage her to confide herself to me: it is my wretchedness alone which can operate upon her, and there is not in being a more wretched person than myself.

Since a premature experience has given me, at an early season, the qualities peculiar

culiar to old-age, by discouraging the illusions of hope; I have not wearied Heaven by that variety of prayers and wishes, which young men indulge; I only requested one favour, which was, never to have to reproach myself with the misery of another; for remorse is the only suffering of the soul, which time and reflexion will never be able to soothe. This remorse is determined to pursue me; it is in vain for me to have subdued the vivacity of my sentiments: reason will destroy the illusive charms of pleasure, without softening the asperity of my misfortunes.

The image of the sweet, the angelic Theresa, sacrificing her youth, burying herself in obscurity—this image, shrouded in the shades of death, will pursue me to the tomb.

You, Madam, who are guided by the genius of goodness, the passion for virtue, and by the pure soul of an angel, do you assist me on this occasion. I find you a faithful friend, who having delivered you this

this letter, and received your answer, will return to the frontiers of France, where I shall be in waiting for him. It is to him only you will please to give the safe-conduct, which I so ardently desire. You will obtain it, for nothing can be refused to your intreaties, and you will save Theresa and me from misery and eternal punishment.

CH. DE SERBELLANE.

P. S. It is expedient that Madame d'Ervins should not know my intention of returning to France.

LETTER XX.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Paris, September 17.

THE connexion which I have lately formed, must henceforth forbid me to take any further interest in your destiny: but I hope

I hope you will not refuse me the satisfaction of being acquainted with your sentiments on this occasion. Indulge me with a few moments conversation with you alone, at any hour you may please to appoint. I shall set out for Spain, after having the happiness of seeing you; this favour, which I now request, shall be the last concern you will ever have with my unhappy life. I cannot possibly entertain any doubts with respect to the wrongs you have done yourself as well as me; but if you should feel any uneasiness on my account, if I could induce myself to pardon you, I should proceed on my journey with more calmness, and perhaps with less misery.

LETTER

LETTER XXI.

DELPHINE TO LEONCE.

September 17.

PARDON me!—strange expression!—I will see you, Sir; though your note, perhaps, has not deserved an answer. I must, however, come to an explanation with you, for the sake of my own dignity. This present day I mean to dedicate to those duties of friendship, which you shall never teach me to neglect; but to-morrow, select the moment which you will prefer for the interview. I shall compel you, as I hope, to restore me that esteem which is my due; and it is with this view only, that I consent to meet you. I do not well conceive what questions you intend to ask me, respecting my future lot; but it is easy for you to anticipate it. I am going to pass the remainder of my days with my sister-in-law;

law; and I feel no longet any interest, or even hope of happiness, in a world in which my confidence has been abused.

LETTER XXII.

DELPHINE TO MAD[LLE] D'ALBEMAR.

17th Sept. (in the evening).

LEONCE has written to me, to request an interview; and I have not hesitated to consent to it: what is more, I considered it as a favour from Heaven, to have an opportunity presented to me, of knowing the injuries of which he accuses me, and of answering with truth and frankness, and, it may be, with a becoming dignity and pride.

Do not give yourself up to any uneasiness, my dear sister, because I have not yielded to your counsels. Leonce is no longer formidable, whatever sentiments he may express for me: if he should wish to make me contemptible by that love, which might have been my glory and happiness .... No, Leonce; no—she whom you have deemed unworthy of being your wife, will not accept your repentance, if you should really feel it: I am not like you, inexorable towards violations of the :rules of convenience, towards faults of appearance only, and actions condemned by the world, but juſtified by the heart: I shall make it evident to you, that true virtue has the greater influence over my mind, only because I abjure every other authority. This Delphine that you think so weak, and so easily deluded, will be courageous and resolute against the most impassioned sentiment of her heart — against

against you: — yes, I shall be so, my dear sister, although I should surrender my life in order to obtain a single hour, in which I could persuade myself that he loves me still, and is not the husband of Matilda.

To-morrow Leonce is to appear! I have had this day sufficient resolution to endeavour to procure a safe-conduct for M. de Serbellane, to enable him to return to France. He conjured me by letter to obtain this favour for him; and I found his request natural and reasonable; for, in my opinion, which is likewise his, there is no other method of preventing Theresa taking the veil. She has not, as yet, entrusted me with this fatal resolution; but M. de Serbellane has written to me, that he has heard it from her; and every observation I have made, leads to confirm the idea. I have been to Paris this morning, to speak to the Tuscan Envoy: he was not at home; but as

he is to pass the evening at Madame de Vernon's, I have begged her to deliver him a letter from me, which contains my request for M. de Serbellane, and to second my petition when she presents it. Madame de Vernon will succeed in this affair, as well as I could myself; and in such trouble as I am, it would be impossible for me to appear in public.

I have returned this evening to Bellerive: it is now late: the day which precedes to-morrow is on the point of closing: the agitation of my heart is violent, and yet I feel no uncertainty. I expect no novelty, only a little more or less of grief, in a separation without hope. Watch over me, from the summit of Heaven, my dear sister; and your brother too, my protector, support me in this crisis. He will not endure that Delphine, so unfortunate, and still so pure and irreproachable, should dishonour his cares for her

sake,

sake, his goodness and affection, by indulging for a moment any guilty sentiments! I cannot well express what I feel in this dreadful moment of expectation, which suspends all the powers of the soul; but when Leonce arrives, I shall recover my fortitude; and if virtue ordains that I shall see him to-morrow for the last time of my life, my dear Louisa, I am willing to obey.

LETTER XXIII.

DELPHINE TO MAD^LLE D'ALBEMAR.

Sept. 18, at midnight.

I WAS in the wrong, my dear sister, truly in the wrong, to give myself any concern about the conduct I should adopt to M. de Mondoville. He was prepared to spare me that trouble; he only wished, I think, to make the experiment, whether I was weak enough to consent to see him once more. He has played with my feelings in the most insulting manner: he departed last night for Spain—last night! and on this day the appointment—Alas! all this is too much; my soul is totally altered: however, I will speak to you about him with coldness and disdain. His departure is a thousand times worse than his marriage! no error of any description

can

can account for it! it is nothing but cold and thoughtless barbarity; it does not even bear the aspect of his usual faults. I have been indeed cruelly deceived; I have embraced the most noble, the most seducing illusion in the place of his real character; and this illusion I must renounce, as well as every other which the heart so passionately indulges. As long as we are doomed to live, we must reject the affections which are connected with our ideas of happiness; for they no sooner promise the accomplishment of our wishes, than they instantly deceive our flattering expectations. Farewell, Louisa; my sentiments are all bitterness, and I dread to express them. Farewell.

LETTER XXIV.

DELPHINE TO MAD^LLE D'ALBEMAR.

Sept. 21.

I HAVE not been able to write to you for these two days; and fearing that a longer silence would give you some uneasiness, I do not wish to protract it: but what can I say on the present occasion? Nothing, absolutely nothing: there is nothing, even in my life of grief, to communicate to you. I feel a disquiet for myself, since I can no longer think of him; there is nothing in my heart or mind, which now interests me. As Theresa stops some time with me, I cannot depart immediately; and moreover, Madame de Vernon is taken ill, and perhaps ruined for ever. It is my earnest desire to console her in her troubles, and thus make some reparation to her for the unjust

unjust suspicions I had entertained. There is still in my power some fortune, and some attention to bestow; and I wish to do good to somebody with what still remains in my hands, and above all to Madame de Vernon, if it be possible. I am surprised that I am able to serve any person in the world; and if I can do any good, I am bound to perform it.

I shall endeavour to engage Madame de Vernon to take an excursion into the southern provinces, as something of this kind is requisite for the alarming state of her breast. If she has deranged her circumstances, I shall offer her what services I can render her; but I shall not pretend to offer her any counsel on her future conduct in life.

Alas! am I capable of judging, or of discovering truth? on what subject shall any one refer to my opinion, since I am incapable of directing myself? My head is disordered; I observe nothing that passes, and I take for realities the offspring of my

own imagination. My heart is still alive to sensibility, but ready to be torn away by any invader! I declare to you, my dear Louisa, that I am nothing now but a tolerable creature, that is in need of instruction, and of whom nobody must ever speak as a woman that was once distinguished on any account whatsoever.

I feel still a sort of desire to give you an account of the last hours, the remembrance of which I wish to preserve; those, I mean, which have closed the history of my life. You must not either be ignorant of every thing I have experienced during the course of my existence; only do not answer me on this subject. Speak to me about yourself alone, and concerning what I may be able to do for you. Say nothing to me about myself: there is no longer a Delphine, since there is no Leonce! Fear, hope, and every other sentiment, has vanished with my esteem for him, and left the world and my heart completely empty to me.

For my own punishment, I must confess, that on the day I expected the interview with him, he was dearer to me than at any other moment of my life. From the very instant of sun-rise, what interest did I not feel in every hour that elapsed! In what different manners did I not calculate the probable moment of his arrival! At first, it appeared me that he would arrive at the hour he might suppose to be that of my rising, in order to secure the certainty of seeing me alone. When that hour was passed, I imagined that I was wrong in fancying that he would choose it, and I relied on seeing him between twelve and three o'clock. At the slightest noise that I heard, I began to combine a thousand minute reasons for his coming on horseback, or by a carriage. I did not go to Theresa's, nor did I open a book; I did not even walk, but stood immoveable where I had a prospect of the road. As the village clock of Bellerive strikes only the half-hours, I kept my watch before me, and looked at it, when

my eyes could quit the window. Sometimes I fixed in my mind a certain space of time, which I determined to devote to the consideration of different ideas; yet this period proved precisely the moment of my most violent agitation.

The most painful idea that I endured was, perhaps, at the moment of sun-set. I had seen the sun-rise that morning, and my heart was soothed with the most pleasing sensations of hope; but when he disappeared, he carried with him every sentiment with which his early aspect had inspired me. However, to this hour of discouragement succeeded shortly an idea that revived me: I was surprised at myself, for not reflecting that Leonce would choose the night-time, in order to converse the longer with me; and I relapsed into that most cruel situation of all, when hope itself is as painful as uncertainty.

The darkness prevented me from distinguishing, at a distance, the different objects around me; and I was now reduced to attend

to some confused sounds that were heard in the country; and the nearer night approached, the more uniform and oppressive were the pangs that I experienced. How much did I not regret the loss of day—of that day, the single hours of which had hung so heavy on me!

At last, I hear a carriage approaching; it comes up to our door, and I have no longer any doubts. I hear them coming up my stairs, but I dare not advance a step. My servants open the folding-doors, carrying lights, and I behold Madame de Mondoville and Madame de Vernon entering! It is impossible to paint to you the sensations of my soul, when, after the cruel punishment of suspense, I passed through every stage of hope that announced the end of my misery; and finding myself suddenly deceived, I was thrown back into a state of agony a thousand times more devoted to despair than I was before the momentary consolation which relieved me, only to sink me deeper in distress.

I had

I had not strength sufficient to support myself at this interview. The idea that Leonce was coming, presented itself to me, and that he would immediately depart on finding that I was not alone, and I should therefore lose, perhaps for ever, the opportunity of speaking to him. I received Madame de Mondoville, and her mother, with incredible inattention: I rose, and sat down again; I got up to ring, I called for tea—and recollecting, all at once, that this preparation might induce them to stay, I asked them, whether it was their intention to return to Paris that night. They had just arrived, and nothing could be more absurd than such a question; but I was not able to support the repugnant passions and sentiments which their presence exposed me to.

Madame de Vernon approached me with the most amiable attention, in order to call me aside, when Madame de Mondoville anticipated her, and said to me: "I have wished to accompany my mother here

this

this evening; it was her intention to come alone, but I was in want of your society, to relieve me from the uneasiness I have suffered this morning, from learning that my husband has been obliged so set out for Spain this night. On hearing these words, a sudden darkness overspread my eyes, and I could discern nothing around me. Madame de Mondoville would have perceived my condition, had not her mother, with that promptitude and quickness of apprehension which belong exclusively to her, placed herself between her daughter and me, when I was sinking back into my chair, and instantly requested her daughter to go and tell a servant to bring a letter, which she had left, through forgetfulness, in her chaise.

While Matilda was absent, Madame de Vernon carried me, in a manner, in her arms, into the next chamber, and said to me: "Wait for me a while, and I shall be with you in an instant." She left me, and went to advise her daughter to retire to the

the apartment appointed for her, and told her that I was much in want of some repose. Her daughter desired nothing more than to retire, and did not entertain the slightest suspicion of what had happened. Madame de Vernon then returned, but I had scarce recovered my senses; and when she approached me, I forgot entirely the suspicions I had conceived, and threw myself into her arms with the most excessive confidence. Alas! I was in great want of a friend to vent my sorrows to, and I should have compelled her to assume that capacity, had her heart been otherwise inclined. Often did I exclaim in the wildness of my grief: "He is gone, Sophia, he is gone! even on this day, on which he had appointed to see me!—What a cruel insult! what contempt!" I confessed every thing to Madame de Vernon—she had presaged every thing that occurred: she made me perceive, with the utmost delicacy, but at the same with the most evident marks of truth, to what a degree

I was culpable in entertaining suspicions against her. "Do not you see," said she, "what a decided prepossession this man must have formed against you, when he could bring himself to adopt such a mode of conduct? You imagined that he was jealous of M. de Serbellane; but could he be reasonably so, after the confidential communication I had made him on your part? The last note you sent him, in which you announce to him, as you inform me, your resolution to remain in Languedoc, did not this note destroy the effect of every report that was spread about, respecting your pretended journey into Portugal? I must repeat it to you, he is a man who still retains a strong passion for you, a circumstance very natural, but who does not wish to surrender himself to it, because your character is not adapted to his; and, as his inclination draws him towards you, he takes decided steps to extricate himself from the effects of his passion.

There

There is nobody more violent than Leonce; you know him to be so, and his conduct proves it: he departed this night, without acquainting me with his intentions; he only informed his wife, in a very cold and concise note, that in consequence of a letter from his mother, he was compelled to depart instantaneously; and I know positively from his servants, that he had received no letters from Spain. It must be you, therefore, that he avoided; his very fear is a proof that he dreads your ascendancy, but will not submit to it; though your delicacy might allow you, at present, to consent to desire it."

I was willing to justify myself to Madame de Vernon, from any suspicion that might offend Matilda; but her generous soul was indignant, at my thinking such an explanation requisite. She testified the most perfect esteem for me: the embarrassment which I sometimes remarked in her, was totally dissipated; and through the medium of my grief, I acquired more certainty

tainty than ever, that she loved me with tenderness. Alas! her health is very indifferent, for her late hours have considerably injured her breast. I wanted to engage her to speak to me about her affairs and her designs, but she constantly drew the conversation back upon myself, with a peculiar grace, which sits naturally on her; never fatigued in questioning me, sifting me, and discovering all the differents hades of my sentiments; attempting sometimes to console me, and forgetting nothing that could be said to a person in my circumstances: in short, without her, I know not whether I should have been able to support this last affliction. My sentiments were sorrowful and humiliating, and Sophia has raised me in my own opinion; she has discovered how to alleviate my sufferings, and to preserve me, at least, from an irritability and resentment which would have given an unnatural bias to my character.

My dear Louisa, I deeply felt your absence on these trying occasions, and was compelled to have recourse to other aid; but as Theresa will probably quit me in a month, I shall come and surrender myself to you; and if I cannot endure to live, you will make due allowance for the violence of my despair.

LETTER XXV.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Bourdeaux, September 23.

WOULD you have imagined that it would be from this city you were to receive my first letter? I had appointed an interview with Delphine, and you see that I have departed without seeing her. I travelled without stopping, till I came to this town; it was my intention to have proceeded

proceeded in the same manner, until I should meet that proud and fortunate man whom they are endeavouring to bring back to France. A sudden fever has seized me with such violence, that I am forced to suspend my journey; but M. de Serbellane passes this way, a circumstance which I had previously discovered; he had sent a message to his friends to that effect: but he is, perhaps, more likely to end his travels in this town.

Yes, I have departed, even at the moment that she consented to see me, when I have every reason to believe that she had prepared some new stratagems to ensnare me.

I have departed without regret, but still with a strong sentiment of indignation, which has totally changed my disposition towards her. Read, my dear friend, the following words, which will astonish you much less than they do myself, while I am tracing them—*Madame d'Albemar has neither merited your esteem, nor your love.*

When

When I had received her answer, in compliance with my desire of seeing her, I did not venture to write to you, my dear M. Barton, immediately, on that subject; but I was not able to contain within my breast the joy which I experienced. I walked about my apartment with a degree of transport which totally overpowered my reflexions. Sometimes the lively emotions of bliss oppressed me so violently, that in order to tranquillize my spirits, I endeavoured to recall to my mind every aggravating circumstance in my situation and my connexions. But there are moments in which the soul rejects every painful sensation; and those sad ideas which the day before affected me so profoundly, now only glided over my heart, as if it was invulnerable to their attacks.

I had shut myself up in the apartment, when one of my servants knocked at the door: I started at the sound: every unexpected event tends to alarm me; and I dreaded then the appearance of a letter from Madame

Madame d'Albemar: I shrunk even at the idea of a pleasing emotion! A note from Madame de Vernon was handed to me, who wished to see me instantly on a family matter of importance. I could not well avoid going to Madame de Vernon's, who told me immediately the matter in question; and I repented, I confess, having come for such a trivial circumstance. A few moments she called aside the Tuscan Envoy, who was on a visit to her, and begged of me to wait a little, as she had something further to communicate to me.

I heard her say to the Tuscan Envoy: "This is a letter from Madame d'Albemar, and I beg you will second with your influence, at the Minister's, her request in favour of M. de Serbellane." On hearing this name pronounced, I rose; and notwithstanding the rudeness of such a sudden interruption, I went up to Madame de Vernon. She continued to speak while I was near her; and I learned, just Heavens! that Madame d'Albemar had been that morning

at

at the Tuscan Envoy's, to obtain by her credit a safe-conduct to permit M. de Serbellane to return to France, without any molestation on account of his duel. Not having found the Tuscan Envoy at home, she renewed her request by writing to him, and charged Madame de Vernon with delivering the letter. I saw Madame d'Albemar's hand-writing; she has obtained the object of her request, and M. de Serbellane is to be in France within a fortnight. He is to be there; but he will find me on his way; and I shall compel him to furnish me with some pretext for revenge.

My resolution was immediately decided on: I determined to be beforehand with M. de Serbellane, and to set off without further delay. Had I stopped a single day, I could not have resisted the vehement desire of seeing Madame d'Albemar, and loading her with the most insulting reproaches. This would also furnish a fresh triumph for her; but my departure, at the instant when her cold and treacherous letter

had

had granted me an opportunity of seeing her; this departure, I say, without a word of apology, or consideration for her, will, I hope, mortally offend her.

I have written to Madame de Mondoville, and provided her with some pretext or other for my journey. I took leave of nobody; and my servants, on receiving my orders respecting my departure, looked at me with every mark of astonishment. Though I fancied myself to be calm, yet I believe some circumstances in my behaviour betrayed the inward emotions of my soul. If I had seen any person, my agitation must have been perceived, and perhaps Delphine might have heard of it! I desire nothing more, than that she should believe me to be calm and disdainful: if I am to die of the evils that prey upon me, my dear friend, never tell her, I beseech you, that she has been the cause of my death. I demand your oath of secrecy on this subject:—I should even feel a kind of rage against the fever which torments me,

 if

if I imagined she would attribute it to love.

I wished likewise to remove myself at a distance from Madame de Vernon: she is a woman that I hate, but I make this declaration with a suspicion of its injustice. All the troubles that I have of late experienced, she has been the first to announce to me. Even since my marriage, whenever an idea of any kind, or any circumstance gave me pleasure, chance, by some means or other, brought this woman in the way to undeceive me by the truth; I confess, the real truth; but of such a nature, that you cannot listen to it without detesting your informant. Do not attack me for this prejudice, for I condemn it myself; but what do I not condemn in my own conduct? and yet I cannot master my passions and inclinations. Happy would it be for me, if I were to die on this occasion! Do not, however, fear that M. de Serbellane will kill me. No—it is not reasonably to be expected that he should succeed in

in every enterprise: I think he has enjoyed prosperity and good fortune enough already; and, if he sets a foot in France, I am determined he shall find the termination of his career.

LETTER XXVI.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, October 2.

WELL! Theresa continues inflexible! She, for whom I have sacrificed all the happiness of my life, is not to enjoy, for a single hour, the fruit of my devoted attachment, and of my too easy friendship! My dear Louisa, the recital I shall make to you, will excite your compassion for Theresa; but, alas! Delphine has a stronger claim on your sympathy. Ah! what a scene

scene of misery and misfortune on the earth! We may naturally ask, where are the happy to be found? Or, are they only among those who are really worthy of happiness?

For some time past, I have seldom visited Madame d'Ervins: a priest, from a neighbouring convent, of a simple and reverend exterior, continued to pass a good part of his time with her alone; while I, overwhelmed with grief, was fearful, if I confided my sorrows to Theresa, that I could not conceal from her, that she was the innocent and involuntary cause of my misfortunes. I relied on the arrival of M. de Serbellane, and on his intreaties, to induce her to renounce her resolution; but M. d'Ervins' brother having arrived at Paris, Theresa had yesterday a long conversation with him, and I hurried to her house as soon as he departed, to endeavour to learn the result.

I have recorded all the words of Theresa, and I shall transmit them faithfully to you.

Alas!

Alas! who could forget such expressions, so full of love, and the spirit of repentance! "I have appeased the anger of M. d'Ervins' brother, said she to me; "and now that he knows my resolution, he feels no longer any hatred against me. This resolution makes peace between me and my enemies, and God, who inspires it, will render it efficacious; but you, to whom I owe so much—you, who have perhaps made more sacrifices on my account than you will acknowledge to me—you have been on the point of ruining me by an impulse of your goodness. You have encouraged M. de Serbellane to return, for so I have learned in time, but it will be in my power to forbid him to come. He shall be informed, that, if he comes to see me, it will be in vain for him to attempt to make me change my resolution; but that he might, by his arrival, rekindle the resentment of M. d'Ervins' relations, and ruin my daughter, in bringing disgrace on her unhappy mother."

I wished to interrupt her several times, but she stopped me short: "Come to-morrow," said she, "immediately after you rise, and we shall take a walk together. I shall then communicate to you every sentiment I feel; but I have no power to do so on the present occasion. It seems to me, that on the approach of night, the presence of a protecting Deity is less sensibly felt; and I have need of his support, to enable me to announce my resolutions with confidence and courage to you. To-morrow, therefore, I am with you with the dawn of day, and with the sun."

When she had quitted me, I began to reflect with bitterness on the obstacles which her religious fervour would oppose to my efforts; and I lamented the sorrowful destiny of two noble creatures, Theresa, and my friend. It was I, wretched I, who was to endeavour to support the courageous resolution of Madame d'Ervins, and my despairing heart was com-

commissioned to console her! Alas! how often in life is this example presented, and how many victims of misery have learned the art of relieving such unhappy creatures as themselves!

I entered Theresa's apartment very early next day, and found her already quite dressed, praying, in her closet, before a crucifix which she had placed there, and at the feet of which she had been shedding a flood of tears. She rose, on my appearance; and, opening her bureau, she addressed me thus: "There, you see, are all the letters which I have received these two months past from M. de Serbellane; I deliver them over to you, with his portrait: it is not required of you to burn them; preserve them, in order that they may survive me, and that nothing belonging to him may perish before me. I insisted on shewing her M. de Serbellane's letter to me; and, while reading it, she blushed, and turned pale alternately. "He has made me, in his letters," continued she, "the

offer which you mention; he has made it to me with more ardent expressions, and more affecting sensibility, and still my resolutions have remained inflexible. Let us go down into the garden, I do not find myself well here; the air will give me fresh force, and I feel the want of it to enable me to open once more to you a heart which is on the point of being closed for all eternity. I followed her steps; her fine black hair, the paleness of her complexion, her looks which alternately depicted love and devotion, gave her, in my eyes, a characteristic expression of beauty which I had never witnessed in her before. We sat down under some trees, which still retained their verdant leaves; and Theresa, turning towards the horizon, her looks so truly full of inspiration, bespoke me thus:

"My dear Delphine, I can confidently assure you, in the presence of this sun, which seems to listen to us in the name of his divine Master, that the object of my

unhappy love is not as yet erased from my heart: before the venerable priest had accepted the vow which I have made to consecrate myself to God, I demanded of him, whether, among the duties I was going to impose on myself, there might be one which might allow me to indulge the recollections which I am not able to suppress. He replied, that the sacrifice of my whole life was the only one that was in my power; he permitted me to mingle with the tears which I shed for my faults, some sorrows for not having been the wife of the man that I loved, and for not having it in my power to reconcile in this manner both virtue and love. In the state which I am about to embrace, I fear nothing but internal struggles with my inclinations; and if my actions only are to be the subject of apprehension, I devote myself with chearfulness to the expiation of M. d'Ervins' death.

"M. de Serbellane offers to marry me, and to pass the remainder of his days with

me in America. Just Heavens! with what transport should I not embrace the offer! what sentiment, even to idolatry, should I not feel for him! but blood separates us, and death disunites us! a spectre draws back my hand from his, and Hell gapes between us both! If I sink, I shall bring the object of my love into the abyss with me; he, unhappy man! would partake my eternal punishment, nor should I obtain from Providence, no more than from mankind, the wretched consolation of condemning myself alone. My tears, and the sacrifice which I make, will perhaps serve his cause in Heaven.—Yes, cried she, with a voice more elevated, yes—I shall pray incessantly for thee; and if my prayers can move the Supreme Being, my dear friend, thou shalt be saved.—Delphine, said she, embracing me, pardon my distraction, I cannot speak of him without betraying myself, and I confound together the passion of love, and the sentiment which commands me to abjure it for ever.

ever. They have told me, that after long exercises of piety and prayer in the temple of God, my ideas would become more calm; and I am inclined to believe these worthy priests, who have addressed to my soul the only language that was adapted to console it.

"It would have been much more embarrassing to me, to live in the midst of the world, after renouncing M. de Serbellane, than to prove to him, by the resolution which I take, how deeply my soul is interested in his favour! This motive, I am sensible, is not worthy of the august state which I am going to embrace; but ought we not to assist, by every means in our power, the inevitable weakness of our nature? And if I perceive myself possessed of more fortitude, in assuming the mournful robes of death, with the reflection that such a sacrifice will draw still tenderer tears from him; wherefore exclude me from the sentiments which support me in this dreadful conflict of the heart?

"One duty alone, one single duty had sufficient influence to detain me in the world; that was, the education of my Isore. My dear Delphine, it is you who have made me perfectly easy, with respect to this anxiety; I will deliver my daughter to your care, the daughter of the unhappy man whose death I have been the cause of. You are much more worthy than I am, to form her tender mind and soul; my neglected education will not allow me to contribute, in any respect, to her instruction, and my heart is too full of trouble, to be ever capable of fortifying her mind against the attacks of adversity. She is only ten years of age, and I am twenty-six; the spectacle of my sorrow acts too violently on her tender organs. Alas! my dear Delphine, you are not happy yourself; perhaps I have ruined your destiny for ever; but your mind is more habituated than mine to the practice of reflexion, and knows better how to withdraw from the observation of a child, the

sentiments

sentiments which it should continue to be ignorant of. The comprehension of your understanding, and the variety of your knowledge, allow you to entertain yourself, as well as others, with a diversity of ideas. As for me, I live and die through love; such is the sameness and monotony of my fate. In the religion which I now snbmit to, I conceive nothing plainly, except its influence over the pangs of the heart; and in my weak and poor head there does not enter a single thought, that does not derive its source from love alone.

"Alas! the destination which I have embraced, will certainly afflict M. de Serbellane; perhaps, also, he might have tasted some happiness with me. This bloody hymeneal inspired him with no horror, and for some years at least he would not have been troubled by the expectation of another life! Ah! my Delphine, it has cost me a long struggle to give him this uneasiness; it seems to me, that a single day's grief of such a man, is more than equivalent

equivalent to all the tears which I have shed. However, an idea, which pride would have rejected, has consoled me at last for the most overwhelming apprehensions. I am dear to him, it is true, but I love him a thousand times more than he ever loved me. A future career and destination still awaits him; he will never bestow on any woman, I believe, that early tenderness which had me for its object, and which formed my glory, though it cost me the loss of honour and of virtue. Love ends with me, in him; but a powerful and energetic existence may yet inspire him with generous expectations.

"As for myself, my dear Delphine, since an imperious duty separates me from him, what sacrifice do I make, in retiring to take the veil? I have experienced what life is, and have made every discovery from it; and nothing remains for me, but fresh tears, to be added to those which I have already shed. Should I have retained my liberty,

liberty, I could never repulse the wandering idea, of the possibility of being united with him. Every day I should have to encounter this idea afresh, with every power of my soul, and I should never enjoy any repose.

"Believe me, my dear friend, there are only two asylums on this earth for our sex, that is to say, love and religion: if I cannot recline my head in the arms of the man whom I love, I call to my relief another powerful protector, who will be able to support me when I am sinking to the earth, when I am even wishing it to receive me for ever in its bosom.

"I have discovered, within this last month, that misery has its resources: I found them in the impressions which I formerly let escape without thinking to collect them, and in the wonders of nature, which I never noticed before: from all these I have derived succours and consolations, which will prepare a happy calm for me in the state I am going to embrace.

embrace. I shall, in short, have every indulgence in prayer and meditation; and these are the sweetest enjoyments to be found on earth for souls for ever exiled from love.

"Perhaps also, by some special favour, women experience in advance those sentiments which are, on some future day, to be the lot of the favoured elect of Heaven: but, if I can believe my own heart, they cannot possibly exist in this active, rotationary, busy world: something more exalted, enthusiastic, and supernatual, is absolutely necessary for them, which may elevate their minds into the ethereal regions.

"In the delusion of my heart, I confounded the idea of love and virtue, and this was the only sentiment which could lead to criminality by a natural sense of noble and generous emotions. But how dreadful is it to awake from such fatal and illusive notions! To escape from their captivity, nothing less was necessary, than

that I should become the assassin of the man whom I had sworn inviolably to love! Oh! what a tremendous reflection! and how afflicting must have been my despair, did not religion present me with a species of atonement sufficiently ample and efficacious to reconcile me once more with myself!

"This sacrifice is now made, and God has pardoned my crime: I am conscious that he has pardoned me, because I feel the soothing balm of his mercy. My remorse is assuaged, and the pleasing melancholy of soft and tender minds resumes its empire in my heart. By it I still communicate with the Divinity; and if, in another world, my unhappy husband should lose his pride and irritability, if he reads the secrets of the heart, he likewise, I am firmly persuaded, he will feel compassion for my fate."

Theresa, on pronouncing these latter words, ceased to speak, and suppressed the tears which were coming into her

eyes.

eyes. I was deeply affected myself, and collected all the powers of my mind to combat the design of Theresa: still, in my heart, I must own, I did not disapprove of her plan, though I do not hold the same opinions on religious matters which she is known to entertain. I think, however, I should like that solitary, recluse, and regular life, which must finally subdue all the irregular movements of the heart. I was desirous also of terrifying Theresa, by a description of the endless sorrow she should be condemned to; but she interrupted me suddenly, and would not permit me to proceed.

"Oh! what can you say to me," cried she, "which he has not already written to me? or what has not my love, more eloquent than he, pleaded in his favour in my heart? Let us speak no more on what is irrevocable, said she, gently imposing silence on me; my vows are deposited at the feet of the Almighty; it now remains to proclaim them before mankind. But the everlasting bonds are already

already closed around me, beyond recovery or redemption.

"I have never told you, that I should be happy; I felt no unhappiness in life, except when I beheld him, and when he spoke to me: his voice alone revived in my heart the animated sensations of existence: but still, I have no farther reason to dread those violent torments of remorse by which the divine vengeance signalizes its tremendous power. Henceforth a stranger to life, I shall behold it gliding along, like the rivulet which runs before us, and whose equable and uniform motion contributes to bestow on us a sort of pleasing tranquillity. The recollection of my singular destiny, perhaps, may trouble for some time my peaceful abode of retirement; but at last, as they assure me, this recollection will become feeble, and the distant murmur of the busy world will be only confusedly heard: it is thus I shall learn to die, and thus I shall sink into final repose, blest by a mild

mild and merciful God, and perhaps still cherished by those who formerly loved me.

"This day I set out for Bordeaux with my brother-in-law, continued Theresa, where I shall remain a few months.

"I shall return to you, before I take the veil, in order to bring Isore with me, and transfer to you all my privileges over her. I conjure you, my dear Delphine, let us never abandon ourselves to the illusions of passion; I have been scarce able to restrain my feelings, during my conversation with you this day. You might have seen that Theresa is not yet become insensible, and she will never be so: but I ought to endeavour to appear in that light, in order to receive the full benefit of the resolution which I have adopted. We must command the empire of our hearts, we must not even express the emotions which we feel, and it is thus only they can be totally subdued. We shall then, as they assure me, overpower every pas-

passion which religion glories in triumphing over. My dear Delphine, my generous friend, retain my last accents in your recollection; they are the eternal adieus which precede death; and you will hear no more the voice that issues from the heart. Farewell!" Theresa then quitted me; I followed her not, but continued some time alone, to give vent to my sorrow in tears. I was sensible likewise, that it was not at the moment of her departure, that I could hope to make any impression on her, and I expected more effect from my letters during her absence. When I returned into the house, M. d'Ervins' brother-in-law had arrived; and Theresa was making preparations for her journey with a surprising firmness. Isore wept bitterly on taking leave of me, and Madame d'Ervins, on going down to her carriage, turned away her eyes several times, that she might not witness the affliction of the little innocent. Theresa got into her carriage without

saying

saying a word to me; but on taking her hand, I perceived, by its trembling agitation, what painful sensations of grief she must have felt.

Theresa! thou tender and gentle being, (as I repeated several times to myself after her departure) will this strength, which you do not derive from yourself, support you for any length of time? Will not the sentiments of religion be gradually cooled in your breast—the exalted sentiments of a religion which subsists on credulity and enthusiasm alone? May you not lose, one day, that faith of the heart alone, which blinds you to every other idea? But, alas! I, who think myself more enlightened, know not what is to become of me.—Will not the expectation of a future life, the principles which have been implanted by a Being perfectly good, the ideas of religion, so reasonable and so sensible, will they not restore me to myself? or is love to be subdued by superstitious phantoms only, which fill our minds with horror?—Grief, my dear Louisa, makes every thing doubtful

doubtful to us, and we are never satisfied with any of our faculties or opinions, when they have not proved a sufficient defence against the afflictions of life.

LETTER XXVII.

DELPHINE TO MAD^{LLE} D'ALBEMAR.

Bellerive, Oct. 14.

I BESEECH you, my dear Louisa, to deliver this note to M. de Clarimin, by which I become security for the sum of sixty thousand livres, which Madame de Vernon owes him: moreover, obtain from him, I conjure you, a promise of ceasing to calumniate me. He lives on his estate, a few leagues from you, and it will be an easy matter to prevail on him to come and speak to you. As soon as I shall have received your answer, and shall have made

Madame

Madame de Vernon acquainted with this circumstance, the affairs which detain her here will be finally settled, and we shall set out together for Languedoc; I, for the purpose of rejoining you; and she, to accompany me, and pass the winter in the warm provinces. Her physicians say that her breast is considerably affected: she seems herself to think that she is in danger; but it gives her very little concern. Alas! if I be condemned to lose her, grief will totally deprive me of what little strength I have left.

I did not learn from Madame de Vernon the embarrassed state of her affairs; chance alone brought me acquainted with this circumstance, and I knew it only the day before, when Madame de Mondoville and Madame de Vernon called on me yesterday. I took Madame de Mondoville aside, and asked her, if what I heard about the complaint of M. de Clarimin against her mother was true. "Yes," replied she, "my mother wanted me to engage

myself

myself for the sum of sixty thousand livres which she owes him, during the absence of M. de Mondoville; but this I could not comply with, for I have no title to dispose of any thing without the consent of my husband; and my mother does not wish that I should ask his permission to do so. You know I set little value on fortune; but I pride myself on being strict in the performance of my duties. She said true, my dear Louisa, for she is not over and above attached to money; but yet her mother might be at death's door, before she would consent to sacrifice a single idea respecting what appears to her conformable to that propriety of conduct which she endeavours to support.

"I do not conceive," said I to her, rather hastily, "what sense of duty can prevent any one from being serviceable to a mother; but in short . . . . ." She interrupted me at these words, rather peevishly; for direct attacks irritate her the more, on this account, that she does not understand those

of another description. "You seem to me, cousin," said she, "to have no fixed principles on any point of conduct; and what would become of virtue, if we were to give scope to every sudden impression and emotion?" "And what is virtue," said I, "but a continuation of generous emotions? But let us drop this subject; for it concerns me, and me alone."

Madame de Vernon came up to us, and interrupted our conversation; on seeing her by day-light, I was painfully struck with her emaciated and dejected aspect, and never did I feel a more tender attachment to her! Madame de Mondoville returned to Paris: I kept Madame de Vernon with me; and the following morning, when she rose, I presented her with an order on my banker for sixty thousand livres, and begged her acceptance of it. "No," said she, "it is impossible; it was my daughter's duty, my daughter for whom I have done every thing, to extricate me from my present embarrassment.

ment. She has done right, perhaps, in refusing me; I never formed her for my purposes: I committed her education to others, and we can neither understand one another, nor agree together on any subject. But it is not you—no, it is not you, in reality, my dear Delphine, who ought to render me so important a service."—"Why then will you refuse me the happiness of assisting you?" said I. "Two years ago you consented to it; and now, on a sudden, after the marriage of your daughter". . . . "Ah!" said she, "the marriage of my daughter . . . . Then, after a sudden pause, she proceeded: "For some time past, I have been unfortunate in every thing. Perhaps I have acted wrong; but in short, in the state in which I am now, all this will not last long."—Do not you desire to hinder M. de Clarimin from accusing you? "I thought he was my friend," said she with a sigh; perhaps I only gave myself up to illusions; but this indeed is not a turn of mind I am much inclined to.

 However,

However, he wishes to ruin me totally in the opinion of the world, and seize on every thing in my possession. It is wrong in him to do so, for I have not long to live; and it is a harsh proceeding in him, to deprive me of that wretched existence to which I have sacrificed every blessing." "In the name of God," said I, with tears in my eyes, "reject these horrible ideas, and do not refuse accepting the service which I request you to avail yourself of. I am in affliction, in cruel affliction, as you know: but do not deprive me of the only satisfaction which I can derive from my useless fortune." "Well, then," said Madame de Vernon, "I believe you to be generous: when I die, whatever may happen after me, you will not repent of doing me this last service. It is not requisite that you should lend me the sum which I owe: your security is sufficient, and I accept it."

There was something sorrowful and gloomy in the accents of Madame de Vernon, which gave me much uneasiness. Poor woman!

woman! the injustice of mankind has, perhaps, soured a temper so sweet, and has disturbed a mind naturally so calm. Alas! what mischief do not hard-hearted people cause! I then made some observations to her on her passion for play.—" Alas!" replied she, " you know not how difficult a thing it is, to be a woman without fortune, without youth, or children to surround us: we are obliged to try every effort to banish such painful ideas." I did not think proper to insist on the losses she exposed herself to, at the moment when I had done her a service; and I endeavoured to turn the conversation on other subjects.

In the evening a vast deal of company came to see me. It was known, that Madame d'Ervins, for whose sake I said that I would avoid society, was no longer at Bellerive. My announced departure drew many persons to see me, who wished to make me believe that they regret my departure, and whose good-will is wonderfully revived in my favour, by the idea of my approaching absence.

While the circle was full in the drawing-room at Bellerive, Madame de Lebensei arrived with her husband, whom she had promised to bring to see me. Upon seeing such a numerous company, she seemed entirely disconcerted, and went down into the garden, under the pretext of taking the air. It was impossible for me to detain her; and perhaps it was better that she kept at a distance, for the looks of all the women were already composed for her reception. M. de Lebensei did not retire: I even remarked that he stopped behind intentionally. He wished to find an opportunity of testifying his indifference respecting the malignant arrangements of society. He was in the right; for, under the proscription of opinion, a woman must sink though a man may rise above it. It seems that, in this respect, the men, having made the laws themselves, are at perfect liberty to interpret them, or spurn their regulations.

I was struck with the good sense of M. de Lebensei: he did not seem to doubt

about

about the cool reception which was destined for his wife; and he spoke on serious objects with a vast superiority. He addressed himself to nobody but me; and discovered the art of indicating his disdain for the censure of which he was the object, without openly expressing it. An air of unconcern, a calmness of tone, and respectful manners, kept every one in his proper place. He made no alteration, perhaps, in the received opinions of the company; but he forced them to silence, and that is a good deal; for this description of persons raise their estimation by the discretion of their conversation; and a man who compels others to circumspection in his presence, is respected in some degree also during his absence.

When Madame de Lebensei had returned to us, after the departure of the company, M. de Lebensei continued to display that independence of character and opinions which distinguish him from other men; and I could perceive that his conversation, by fortifying my mind, did me real good

 Good,

Good, did I say? what an uncommon expression have I adopted!—Alas! if you knew the state of my soul.... But since I have promised to restrain myself, I must have the resolution to do so, even towards you.

LETTER XXVIII.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, October 16.

BEFORE I reunite myself with you for ever, my dear sister, I come to an explanation with you on a subject which I had neglected, but which you explain so clearly in your last letter,* that I cannot well dispense with answering it. You inform me, that M. de Valorbe has constantly preserved the same sentiments for me; that he has not been

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* This letter has been suppressed.

been able, for this year past, to quit his mother, who is on the point of death; but that he has constantly written to you, concerning his desire to see me, and his wish to be acceptable to me. You likewise recall to my attention a circumstance which I can never forget; that is, that he had saved the life of M. d'Albemar ten years ago, and that your brother felt the liveliest gratitude towards him. You add, to this enumeration, some eulogiums on the character and understanding of M. de Valorbe: perhaps I cannot be entirely of your opinion on this subject; but that is not the question at present. If you had known Leonce, you would not think it possible that I should become the wife of any other man; and I should be very much hurt, I confess to you, if the obligation which we owe to M. de Valorbe would impose on you a necessity of admitting him often to visit you. I do not imagine, you may believe me, that I shall see Leonce once more in my life; but if he should learn that I permitted any body to

be particular with me, he would imagine that I was consoling myself; he would entertain no idea of lamenting my fate, which otherwise he might occasionally do; for all the homage of the world would not recompense me for the compassion of Leonce: but this is enough;—and now, as you know the fears which I entertain, I am persuaded you will endeavour to spare me the repetition of them.

As soon as you shall have informed me whether M. de Clarimin will accept my security, we shall set out. Madame de Vernon desires that I should request you to receive her in a friendly manner. My dear sister, I conjure you, do not be unjust towards her: if you cannot overcome the dislike which you express to me in your last letter, be at least moved with the multitude of attentions she has ever shown me; for such kind offices suppose a great share of goodness. Since the departure of Leonce for Spain, I am no longer to be known as the same person. A woman of sense

sense has said, *that the loss of hope made an entire change in the character*. I am now sensible of the truth of this observation; for I once possessed, you know, great gaiety of disposition; I took an interest in every event, and every new idea; and now nothing pleases me, nothing allures me, and I have lost, with my happiness, every thing which made me amiable.

Yet, what a cruel state is this, for a person whose soul was so sensibly alive to all the charms of the mind, and of sensibility! I loved society almost too much; it was often necessary, and always agreeable to me: at present, I can only endure the company of one person, that is, Madame de Vernon. Recompense her, my dear Louisa, by your kindness, for the consolations she has given me.

Never was there such a desire to please, in the midst of intimacy, as in this woman! never was a mind so happily turned for the world, devoted to the consolation of solitary grief! I tell you, sister, and

 you

you will experience it yourself, that Madame de Vernon is a lady of the most irresistible charms in society. I have known agreeable and sensible women; and I could easily discover, when they spoke, wherein the charm of their manners consisted; and, had I desired it, I might have become agreeable by the same means: but every word Madame de Vernon says, is unexpected, and you are not able to follow the traces of her mind, either for the purpose of imitation or penetration. If she loves you, she expresses it to you with a sort of negligence which carries conviction to your soul: she seems to be addressing herself, when words full of sense escape from her, and you collect them when she lets them fall.

My life depends on you and Madame de Vernon alone; so I intreat you, not to let me see you disunited! She has become now much more necessary to me than before; the last attachment, in a manner, which I have preserved from the shipwreck

wreck of my happiness: but I am not under the necessity of expressing more particulars at present. You will find her, alas! both sick and sorrowful; and your kind heart will be undoubtedly interested in her behalf.

LETTER XXIX.

LEONCE TO M. BARTON.

Bourdeaux, October 20.

A VIOLENT fever has forced me to remain near a month in this place, a circumstance which I have concealed from my family at Paris. My mother alone has known it, and I wished no other person but her to take any interest about me. On the first day of this fever, I wrote you, I know not what sort of a foolish letter, which contained,

contained, I believe, some insulting expressions against Madame d'Albemar; I beg of you to burn it, because I was in a delirium when I wrote it: it is not that I wish to justify Delphine, for the faults of which I accuse her; but to every person but myself, she is, and she ought to be, an angel. If you but knew how they speak of her in this place! yet she only remained here two months; but is not that time sufficient to make them not forget her soon?

I shall endeavour, to-morrow, to have a glimpse of Madame d'Ervins; she wishes to see nobody; she is determined, as they say, to become a nun. She places her daughter with Madame d'Albemar; this child speaks with transport of Delphine: I shall see the child at least, if possible—but is there not a strange appearance of mystery in every circumstance in these affairs?

It appears to me, that in your last letter you are less warm in the praise of

Madame

Madame d'Albemar: you did wrong to admit any unfavourable impression from what I wrote to you, for I did not mean to make any impression on any person whatsoever. Preserve your admiration for Madame d'Albemar; I should be unhappy to think that I had diminished it. Reports are circulating, concerning Madame d'Ervins, but the thing is impossible: the first time I heard these reports, I started, and since that time they are contradicted, and entirely disbelieved.

Farewell, my dear master! I shall go and see Madame d'Ervins. But how comes it, that this idea agitates me so? She is the friend of Delphine. M. de Serbellane is gone by sea to Tuscany; he did not wish, then, to return to France.—Alas! I know not where I am.

LETTER XXX.

LEONCE TO DELPHINE.

Bourdeaux, Oct. 22.

DELPHINE! Oh! once beloved Delphine! a child has revealed to me, what the blackest perfidy had found the art of concealing from me. The voice of men had accused you; the voice of a child, that voice of Heaven, has justified you. Hear me, Delphine! this is the most solemn instant of our lives. I am bound for ever, I know it to be so; there is no further happiness for me; but, if I am the only culpable person, and Delphine be innocent, my heart will still have courage enough to suffer.

I went yesterday to see Madame d'Ervins; however irritated I might be, I wished to hear you spoken of by those who love you. Madame d'Ervins being totally

totally given up to the exercises of piety, refused to see me. Isore, her daughter, was playing in the garden, and I went up to her; I was told that she loved you extravagantly. I made her speak about you, and perceived that the impression you produced was already felt, even at that tender age. Shall I tell you the truth? I ventured to question Isore concerning your sentiments. Strange circumstances had oftentimes revived and destroyed my hopes; I accused, sometimes, in a confused and indistinct manner, the artful address of a woman; and I flattered myself that the natural frankness of a child, would baffle the most subtle calculations.

" Madame d'Albemar is to take care of you hereafter," said I to Isore, " and she will certainly bring you to Tuscany."—" To Tuscany! why so?" replied she; " I should be very sorry to go into Italy: it is since my mama has liked that country so much, that we have been so unhappy." "But,"

said

said I, "did not your mother always love Italy? she was born there."—"Oh!" replied Isore, "she quitted it so young, that she remembers nothing of it; but M. de Serbellane has told her every thing. "Do you like M. de Serbellane?" continued I. "I do not dislike him," replied Isore; "but since he has come to see mama, she has been constantly crying." "Constantly crying!" repeated I, with a lively emotion, "and what did Madame d'Albemar on that occasion?— "She consoled mama;" she is so very good! "Oh! undoubtedly she is so," cried I—And in that moment, Delphine, I felt my heart returning to you. "But yet," added I, "she will marry M. de Serbellane!"

"M. de Serbellane!" interrupted Isore, with that vivacity which children manifest when they think themselves in the right —"M. de Serbellane! oh! it is mama who loves him, and not Madame d'Albemar;" and since mama wishes to become

come a nun, she will not marry M. de Serbellane, and certainly Madame d'Albemar will not go to Italy. At these words, Isore's governess took her roughly by the hand, and carried her away, giving her at the same time a severe reprimand. I did not foresee that I should induce this child to do injury to her mother's character; but what is the meaning of the expression which she has mentioned to me? Should it be Madame d'Ervins who loved M. de Serbellane, should it be to save her, that you assumed in the eyes of the world the appearance of every evil imputation; in this case, I should consider you a sublime creature, instead of accusing you of perfidy: and as for myself, I should deserve. . . . No, I should not have deserved every thing that I have suffered.

"But still how can I believe it to be so? Have I not a letter from you, which Madame de Vernon delivered to me, in which you refer me to what she shall commu-

communicate to me on your part? Did she not observe silence, was she not embarrassed, like a friend in confusion for your culpable conduct towards me, when I questioned her on the circumstances which I had learned on my arival at Paris, and which were made public on the occasion of M. d'Ervins' death? These details, each of which caused me a fresh pang of grief, were your attachment for M. de Serbellane, your engagements entered into at Bordeaux with him; the scruple and hesitation which my regard for you excited in your mind, the delicacy which brought you back to your first love, the obligation you were under to follow M. de Serbellane after he had fought a duel for you, and when he was forbidden to reside in France. Did not you tell me yourself, that he was gone, when you knew the contrary to be the case? Was he not shut up in your house four-and-twenty hours with you? . . . . Oh! I feel again, in writing these words, all

all the emotions which I thought were calmed! Did not M. de Serbellane, in the very instant when he had killed M. d'Ervins, make mention of your name? Did not your servants refer to you alone to appear in a court of justice? Did not you go to fetch away M. de Serbellane's portrait? Did not you frequently receive letters from him? Have you denied to any person that you were to marry him? Have you not demanded a safe-conduct for him? But even on the supposition that such a conduct as this was a continual sacrifice to friendship, you must be considered as very imprudent, and I must be very unhappy; yet still you would not have ceased to love me, and it would still be some satisfaction to me to live.

If you have not been culpable, if Madame de Vernon knew the truth, and you had charged her to tell it to me, never have falsehood and treachery employed more infamous, artful, and complicated stratagems! I shall be avenged, if

if her cold insensible heart be susceptible of a wound, if.....But it is not her destiny that now employs my thoughts.

Who will ever be able to comprehend this evil genius that has disposed of my destiny? Madame de Vernon sent me a letter from my mother, conjuring me to keep the promise which she had made, of my marrying Matilda: she spoke in terms of reproach of you. On any other occasion, nothing she could have said would have made any impression on me, but then I fancied her voice was prophetic, and that it announced to me the event that annihilated all my hopes. My mother conjured me, as I valued her peace of mind, to fulfil her promise: it seems, my duty towards her was not, of itself, sufficient to doom me to the misery I have undergone; it was moreover requisite that Madame de Vernon should lay hold on my temper and disposition, with a degree of dexterity which I did not then apprehend, but which afterwards, on recollection,

collection, inspired me with excessive alarm.

There is not one frailty in my character, which she did not endeavour to irritate. She pleaded your cause with warmth, and wounded me to the quick by her manner of justifying your conduct. She exaggerated your indiscretion, in passing for the cause of the duel between M. d'Ervins and M. de Serbellane, and thereby injuring your reputation in the opinion of the world. At the same time, she proposed to engage you, on the score of my despair, to bestow on me your hand; and in this she shocked my feelings and my pride! As far as I can recollect her words at this time, it is possible she may not have exactly told me that you loved M. de Serbellane; but she employed, if possible, more *finesse* to make me think so, than was necessary for her to tell the fact itself. I experienced, while I listened to her, a strange convulsive symptom; my forehead was covered with sweat; I took long strides across her

chamber;

chamber; I withdrew from her, and approached her again, devouring her words, and dreading their effect. My soul was wearied with this conversation, as by a series of bitter sensations, a long life of misery; and yet this fatigue did not exhaust my agitation, but only rendered my emotions still more painful.

This woman, I know not by what secret power, managed my passions as she would an instrument, whose motions she could regulate at pleasure. Every thought that shocked me, she presented to my imagination; every word that wounded my feelings, she incessantly repeated; yet it was not against her that I was irritated. It always appeared to me, that she wished to console me, and that the pangs which I felt were occasioned only by truths that escaped from her, or which she could not succeed in concealing from me.

She sought eagerly for every topic that might excite my natural irritability, on every matter that relates to honour and opinion,

opinion, in order to convince me, without expressly declaring it to me, that I should be dishonoured, if I shewed any further attachment for a woman who was publicly known to have been in the power of another man, or if I only appeared indifferent to the scandal caused by the death of M. d'Ervins. What she said might equally be applied to faults of levity, (if I had imagined you capable of such faults only,) or to errors of opinion; but I seized on every hint that might alarm my jealousy. Madame de Vernon made me what she liked, not by the influence of my affections, but by exciting all the cruel emotions which resentment may inspire. What art! if indeed it be art.

I have still but a confused idea of every circumstance; but is it not possible, that the most generous virtues, and the vilest crimes were combined together to ruin me? Delphine, if the hope which I embrace shall have deceived me; if the child has not spoken the truth, do not answer me;

 I shall

I shall understand your silence, and I shall relapse into the state from which I had, for a moment, emerged. What signifies a letter from your own hand? How is it to be understood? How comprehend, likewise, all the mysteries of that fatal day, of the days that preceded it, and the days that followed it. Ah! I conjure you, conceal nothing from me! Secrecy, in this case, is truly calamitous!

Even since my marriage, since what will shortly be five months, it is strange that Madame de Vernon should still persist in making use of her fatal knowledge of my character, to irritate my jealousy by my pride, my pride by my jealousy, and to lacerate me at once by all the good and bad qualities of my soul. Delphine, the heart of Leonce is still the same—if yours has not been guilty, call to mind when you reposed in confidence on him—alas! alas! since that time a fatal tie.....contrived by the most odious treachery and falsehood......Do not, however, be alarmed for

Madame

Madame de Vernon, nor her daughter; but let not a fatal goodness once more inspire you to sacrifice me to your anxiety for others!

It was my wish, after having seen Isore, to return at that very instant to Paris; but I received a letter from my mother, who was uneasy about my stay at Bordeaux, and thought me to be very ill, by which I learned that, notwithstanding the unfavourable state of her health, she was desirous of setting out to meet me on the road. It is my duty to anticipate her, and therefore I depart. If it be you whose image shall preside over my life, I set out to perform those duties to a mother, which you would recommend on an occasion of this nature. If I am doomed to lose you, it is in Spain that the ashes of my father repose, and it is there my determination shall be to die.

Reflect, my Delphine, with what sensations I shall pass the days which separate me from your answer. I shall be at Madrid

the 1st of November; if you are at Bellerive, my letter may be kept back for some days. I shall wait till the 25th, or during a month, and I have fixed this term for my hope. Until the 25th, my anxiety will be certainly very cruel; but what need I describe it to you? It only imposes one duty on you, which is truth.

LETTER XXXI.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, Oct. 26.

MY dear Louisa, what a letter have I not just received from Leonce! Every thing is revealed, every thing is cleared up; Madame de Vernon! even you yourself would never have imagined she could be capable of it! She has profited by all the pretexts which my confidence had provided

vided her with, to induce Leonce to believe that I was in love with M. de Serbellane, that I admitted him into my house, and detained him four-and-twenty hours; and that I was going to set out, in order to marry him. Just heavens! you may imagine that I am thinking on myself only, and that I shall feel a secret joy in learning that Leonce loves me still! No—I only feel one pang; I have but one thought, and that is betrayed friendship, the most tender friendship and the most faithful. We secretly flatter ourselves, that time will produce changes in our sentiments of affection; but every arrangement must rest on the foundation which is formed by certainty and mutual confidence. My dear friend, if you should deceive me, do you imagine that I could support so dreadful a misfortune? Yet, I loved Madame de Vernon as much as I do you, perhaps still more. I accuse myself for my facility, and I feel the deepest humiliation on this circumstance; but her seducing influence maintained an inconceivable sway

over me. I have had some moments of doubt respecting her, since Leonce's marriage; but she triumphed over them all, and my heart was more devoted to her than ever.

I am now in tremor and agitation, and violently affected, as if Leonce was the sole cause of my trouble. Alas! after devoting so many cares, so many services, and so many years, to acquire a friendship for the remainder of our days, what a painful recollection to behold, all this time, and all this assiduity lost, and vanished for ever! Whom shall I ever find, whom I have loved from my infancy with so much confidence and candour? Should I wish to make another friend after Madame de Vernon, I should scrutinize and examine her, I should be susceptible of anxiety and suspicion; but Sophia—I loved her at a period of my life, in which I was so tender and so true! I can no longer make an offer of a heart which surrendered itself without reserve, and the first impressions of which

Madame

had Madame de Vernon for their object. I shall love where I am loved, I shall be grateful for the marks of attention which shall be bestowed on me; but this lively tenderness, this involuntary and artless sympathy, which was inspired by charms that were new to me, I shall never again experience. I regret Sophia and myself; for I shall never be to any other person what I have been to her alone.

Is it possible that she could accept so many proofs of friendship, if she felt no sympathy for me, nor loved me with a lasting affection for life? Of all human vices, is not ingratitude the hardest, that which supposes the most callous soul, the greatest oblivion of past favours, and of that time, the recollection of which affects so deeply souls endowed with sensibility? As for myself, must I preserve no traces of the past, which she has betrayed? If I give way to my love, if I confirm the suspicions of Leonce, shall I not mortally irritate him against the mother of his wife?

I know his violence, and his generous indignation; he will forbid Matilda to see her mother. I do not wish to ruin Madame de Vernon, from the respect I feel for former sentiments, and I wish to honour in her the friendship with which she had inspired me. But to continue guilty in Leonce's eyes, is a sacrifice entirely out of my reach! What am I then to do, or what is to become of me? I shall write to M. Barton, and request him to open Leonce's eyes, and moderate the effects of his first emotions of resentment.

What then! must I refuse myself the happiness of writing this simple line:—*Delphine has never loved any one except Leonce.*

He hopes for this simple avowal, and he expects it; alas! what a cruel perplexity! I am now going to Madame de Vernon's, and I shall speak to her on the subject: I shall not spare her feelings, if they are not yet extinct. You shall know, when I finish this letter, what she will say

to

to me: but what can she say? I am determined, that for once, at least, she shall hear bitter complaints, which she can never call to mind hereafter without blushing for her conduct.

Midnight.

No—it is beyond my power to conceive, what is become of the idea I had formed of Madame de Vernon's character. I have this moment quitted her, after a conversation of two hours, during which, I was not able to extort a single word from her, that bore any resemblance to that natural and amiable sensibility which I so often discovered in her before. Perhaps, when she found her real character unveiled, she thought it no longer expedient to have recourse to dissimulation; and if she had before exhibited herself to me in the same light as she did this day, my heart would never have been deceived in her.

After receiving Leonce's letter, after giving myself up, in writing to you, to all

 the

the soft and the painful impressions which it revived in my breast, I went to Madame de Vernon's, for the purpose of an explanation. I need not describe to you, with what oppression of heart I proceeded on that road, and entered into that house, which yesterday I considered to be more my property than my own dwelling. The aspect of places which never vary, though our hearts may change, produces a painful and sorrowful sensation, when viewed with sentiments of a very opposite nature from the original impressions of pleasure and happiness. I stopped, however, in Madame de Vernon's anti-chamber, to make some inquiries about her, before I entered her apartments. If she was confined through illness, I was determined to return without seeing her. I was told, that she was much better, and that she had slept till noon: I then advanced with a quick pace, and opened her door somewhat in a violent and hasty manner. She was alone, and came up to me with that air of

warmth and attachment, which had so often charmed me. I was provoked at her duplicity, and, with a violent motion, I flung on the table, before her, Leonce's letter, and desired her to read it.

She took the letter, and, at first sight of it, reddened in a very remarkable manner; but prolonging designedly the time of its perusal, for the purpose of recovering from her surprise and confusion; and when she felt herself perfectly calm and unruffled, she said to me with great coolness: "It is in your power to sow quarrels and hatred in a united family; but it would be more reasonable in you to consider, that it was but right that I should employ every effort in my power to marry my daughter to the best advantage, and to prevent you from depriving her of a husband that had been promised to her."—"Great God!" cried I, "was it just that you should abuse my friendship, and the boundless confidence which I placed in you?"—"And you," interrupted she, "did not you abuse my

hospitality, in coming every day to my house, to steal Leonce's affection from my daughter?"—"Did I ever conceal any thing from you?" replied I with warmth; "did I not even commission you to explain my conduct and sentiments to Leonce?"—"In reality," interrupted Madame de Vernon, "if you will permit me to use the expression, you must have been very simple, to select me to engage Leonce to marry you."—"Very simple!" repeated I with indignation; "very simple! and do you, Madam, make a mockery of generous sentiments? I call Heaven to witness! at the very moment in which I learn that my esteem for your character has totally destroyed the happiness of my life, that I still enjoy the conscious reflexion of being so easy a dupe to your artifice; I enjoy with pride the possession of a mind incapable of detecting perfidy, and which you cruelly played with, and turned to your advantage, as you would the unsuspecting simplicity of a child."

"Leonce himself confesses," replied she, "that it was not I who acquainted him with the general report of the world concerning you; I satisfied myself with not denying the circumstance; which was the least that could be done in my situation. With regard to the pretended power which I maintained over Leonce, whatever he may say on that subject, it is evident he only means to make a sort of apology to you: it is impossible to govern any one without a perfect knowledge of their character. He was displeased with the noise occasioned by the accident at your house, with the imprudence of your conduct, and the independence of your opinions; and all these circumstances were very repugnant to the general turn of his sentiments: and this is the whole of your pretended grievances." "No," replied I suddenly, "it is not the whole of my grievances: you endeavour, by trifling expressions, to confound good and evil together, and conceal your actions under a veil of words: employ with a crafty world

world such base arms, but not against me; a bleeding heart is proof against such artifices. Meditate on every word in Leonce's letter.

I then offered to take back the letter, and read it over again; but Madame de Vernon kept it in her hands, and said to me, in an unconcerned manner: "Do you wish to occupy all Paris with our family quarrels, and show to all your friends this letter from Leonce?" On pronouncing these words, she threw the letter in the fire. This action enraged me; but the more violent my sensations were, the more I endeavoured to repress them; and I arose to depart. Madame de Vernon, upon this, renewed the conversation on a sudden, as she did not wish it to terminate with the extraordinary action which she had taken the liberty to commit. "I once had some friendship for you," said she to me; "but the interest of my daughter must have been naturally nearer to my heart." "What then!" replied I, "did I not pay a proper

regard

regard to her interest, when I made over the estate of Andely's to her, and when I preserved you twice from ruin?" "Delphine, (interrupted Madame d'Albemar), "there is nothing that betrays so great a want of delicacy, as reproaching people with the services rendered to them." "You know better than any other person, Madam," continued I coldly, "how little value I fix on the services I can do for others, when it has fallen in my way to benefit essentially persons whom I did not love: I never preserved the slightest recollection of such favours; but it was with confidence and tender attachment, that I devoted myself for your benefit: the proofs of friendship which I have given you, were addressed to those sentiments of sympathy with which I thought I had inspired you; and if you felt nothing that answers this description, why did you command my friendly exertions in your behalf? Why did you expose yourself to the most humiliating, the most cruel of all reproaches, that of ingratitude?"

"In

" Ingratitude!" cried Madame de Vernon: " that is a word of mighty import, which is generally much abused: people serve each other when they feel a mutual esteem; and when they lose their regard for each other, the mutual interchange of favours ceases. Nothing is done in this world, unless in the spirit of calculation, or through a peculiar bias or inclination: and in either case, I do not know why such stress should be laid on the sentiment of gratitude." " I disdain to answer such wretched sophistry," said I; " but really, had you no friendship for me, when you made me such a display of interest and affection? did not my attachment to you, affect your heart? Is it then true, that for six years our conversations, our letters, our intimacy, and every thing, was nothing but cruel dissimulation on your part? In retracing the happy years which I have passed with you, I feel an insupportable affliction, that I cannot flatter myself, that any period existed in which you loved me sincerely: when, there-

fore,

fore, did you begin to deceive me? Tell me, I conjure you, so that at least I may preserve some pleasing recollections of the days which preceded this unhappy epoch." While I was speaking thus, I was bathed in tears, and I felt no small pain in endeavouring to restrain them. Madame de Vernon appeared to me to preserve the greatest coolness and self-command: however, when she resumed the subject, her voice was somewhat altered.

"All is over between you and me," said she: "such is your temper and disposition, that you will listen to reason on no subject: your speculations are too lofty, to enable you to comprehend the realities of life. If I die of the complaint which threatens my existence, perhaps I may explain my conduct to you; but as long as I shall live, it behoves me to support my existence, and my manner of living in this world, such as it is. I wish also to avoid the painful sensations which your presence, and the scenes of grief which attend it, never fail to bring with

with them; and of course it is better for us so see each other no more." Shall I tell you, my dear Louisa, that I shudder at these last words: I was determined to have no further connexion with Madame de Vernon, I was sensible that I could not bring myself to repeat reproaches of this nature, and that it would be impossible for me to see her without frequent provocations to renew them. But still, I was not prepared to end every intercourse with her on this day; and the rapidity of her decisions, however inevitable it might have been, alarmed me a little. "What!" said I, "cannot you find some excuse, that may weaken my resentment? The illusion of what I was on your account is destroyed," said Madame de Vernon; "and I am too proud to attempt to revive it." "Too proud," cried I, "you who have contrived to deceive me!" "Have done with these reproaches," replied she impatiently; "I am perhaps of more intrinsic merit than I appear to be. Whatever may be the case, I do not like to hear

hear the bad opinion expressed which people entertain of me. You have the power," added she, "of making the few days of life which remain to me, most grievously unfortunate, by revealing every thing to Leonce: you are at liberty to make use of this power: I shall make no attempt to persuade you to a contrary resolution."

"Alas!" cried I, "you know not yet what influence you may possess over me, if repentance—" "Repentance!" interrupted she, with an ironical accent, "that's an idea very much after your taste!" On this reply, and the air that attended it, I recovered my indignation, and advanced towards the door, in order to depart: but stopping suddenly, I cast my eyes on that apartment where I had passed so many agreeable hours, and reflected that I was now on the point of leaving it, never to enter it again.

"Alas!" said I, in a mild manner, "how little have you known the path that leads

to

to true happiness! You met, in the middle of your journey, a young and innocent person who felt for you the first dawn of friendship, a feeling full as tender as the first sentiment of love; a person who was extremely charmed with your mind and manners, and who entertained not the least doubt respecting the morality of your character. You know, that in my circle, I often heard your reputation slandered, but I always endeavoured to justify you; and in doing so, I felt more attached to the good qualities I attributed to you, than if I had never been under the necessity of defending your conduct. You have broken the heart which was devoted to you, though such a cruel instance of ingratitude was not necessary for your interest. You might have commanded the sacrifice of my happiness for my attachment to you, and you have deceived me by your habitual dissimulation, when truth and sincerity might have answered the same purpose. You wished

to ensnare by falsehood what generous friendship would voluntarily have offered. Nevertheless I desire—I ardently desire that you may still be happy; but I fore-warn you, that you will never be loved, as I have proved to you, that it is possible to love. Such tender unions are never formed twice; and however amiable you may be, you will never again experience the friendship, the devotion, and the deluded affection of Delphine. I now quit you for the last time, never to behold you again, and it is I who am affected; I alone! Will you not even attempt to soften the sentiment of sorrow, which I carry with me? Is your talent for dissimulation, which you have made so cruel a use of, deficient only when it might make our last moments less afflicting?" "I can say nothing to you," said she, "I can say nothing to console you; I must only remove from myself every painful sentiment, and not think of renewing connexions, which henceforth must give birth only to unpleasant

unpleasant sensations. It is no longer in your power to forbear to disturb my repose; farewell therefore: it is repose I seek, if I am to live any longer; if not". . . She then paused, as if intending to say something more to me; but, changing her resolution, "Adieu, Delphine," said she to me with a hasty accent, and returned into her closet.

I remained for some time immoveable on that spot; but at last, being ashamed of my emotion, and of that weakness of heart, which had entirely changed our respective situations, and converted her who had been so mortally offended into a humble suppliant to her persecutor; I quitted the house for ever, and returned home, impatient to acquaint you with what had passed. If some degree of maternal tenderness had not been intermingled with your affection for me, if you had not inspired me with sentiments approaching to the nature of filial fondness, and if the premature death of my parents had not transferred

transferred my dutiful attachment to you, I should have experienced some difficulty in describing to you the pangs which I felt from my rupture with Madame de Vernon; but your heart is not accessible, even to the noblest of all jealousies. You feel indulgent towards your child; you pardon her for that lively friendship, which was inspired by her early taste for refined accomplishments, and the first pleasures of society: this fatal friendship existed in conjunction with the most impassioned love; nor did it prejudice, in the slightest degree, that grateful tenderness which I shall ever feel for you alone.

In the mean time, what resolution must I adopt? From my conversation with Madame de Vernon, I could perceive, that she was extremely alarmed for the quiet of her family, in case Leonce should learn the truth; but what regard do I owe to Madame de Vernon? and yet what power on earth can obtain my consent to come to a second misunderstanding with Leonce?

What

What need I mention power? There is only one to dread, and that is the voice of my own heart! and is it true that my heart demands the sacrifice? No — but I must likewise set some value on my own destiny, and my goodness of heart must excite in me some compassion for myself. I have still time to consult M. Barton and have his answer; yours too may reach me, and a fortnight is necessary for letters to come from Madrid; Leonce will wait till the 25th of November, without condemning me for my silence. Ah! my dear sister, what will you write to me? In the struggle which tears my heart, to what sentiment will you incline?

LETTER XXXII.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, November 2, 1793.

I WAIT impatiently for your answer, and that of M. Barton; I count all the days, and shudder at their approach. I consume the hours in reflections, which combat and destroy each other, and keep my heart in constant agitation. Sometimes I find a pleasure in reflecting, that if Leonce's jealousy had not been alarmed, no other cause of dislike would have alienated him from me, so far as to become the husband of Matilda: and in an instant afterwards, I give myself up to despair, from the consideration that the most simple accident might clear up every shadow of doubt and difficulty, and that if I had had the courage to go to him, perhaps, even at the last moment, a word, a single

single word, would have made the most wretched of women, at once the most happy!

What will be his sentiments, when he comes to know my innocence! Yes, most undoubtedly, he shall know it; I shall never be compelled to surrender my right of justifying myself to him. But still, what disorder and trouble am I not going to introduce in his domestic duties, if I make a full and candid avowal of the truth! Is it not better, that time and my own conduct should enlighten him by degrees? But if I continue silent, he announces that he shall consider me criminal; and he will imagine, that I was deceiving him, at the moment when I appeared to love him. It must not be so—this idea is intolerable to me: if I was on the point of death, should I not obtain the privilege of having every thing revealed after my decease? Alas! should I obtain it even then? The happiness of others ought to be sacred to us, as long as it can depend upon our will.

Cruel

Cruel woman! it is on your account, I suffer this frightful uncertainty; it is your repose, which still struggles in my heart, against an inexpressible desire! and will not Matilda likewise suffer, for what I must reveal? Must I write to Leonce, and acquaint him with circumstances, that will make him hate his mother-in-law, and alienate him still more from his wife? Alas! never, never was any person in such a situation, in such a dilemma, when either resolution appears impossible.

In short I must come to some determination; let me only wait for the counsels that may instruct me how to proceed.

My journey into your part of the world is inevitably retarded for a few days, because I cannot now set out with Madame de Vernon. I had placed all my affairs in the hands of a man employed by her, and every thing must be separated, after imagining that every thing was to have been in common between us both for life. I am ashamed to confess to you, how weak I have been.

 This

This morning again, I got into my carriage, to proceed to my notary's; but, as it was necessary, in order to arrive at his house, that I should pass before Madame de Vernon's door, I had no longer the resolution to proceed. I pulled the string of my carriage, in the middle of the street, and gave orders to drive back to my house. I was desirous of arranging my papers before my departure; and I found in every corner letters and notes from Madame de Vernon. It was further necessary to order her picture out of my drawing-room, and send her a multitude of books which she had lent me. Such incidents as these, are more cruel than taking leave of our friends in the hour of our death; for the affections, which even then subsist, spread around some consolation on our last conceptions; but in a rupture of this nature, every detail of separation is tormenting, there is nothing soft or affecting in our ideas, nor any sensation of pleasure intermingled with our tears. I have no longer any person to consult

consult on the daily occurrences of life, and I feel myself unsettled in every respect. I reflect, with some degree of satisfaction, that, through delicacy for Madame de Vernon, I had kept at a distance from some ladies who expressed friendship for me; for I did not wish to confide to any other person, the sentiments I communicated to her, and with respect to her, I was even jealous of myself.

In the midst of these reflections, a thousand times more mild than such a guilty friend ought to expect, Madame de Lebensei found out the secret, yesterday, of making me speak very bitterly of Madame de Vernon. Madame de Lebensei had come expressly from the country to question me; Madame de Vernon had seen her, and found the means of winning her over completely, either by the charms of her manner, or, because, in the situation of Madame de Lebensei, people are cautious of quarrelling with any body, and

become, with little difficulty, favourably inclined to all who treat them well.

I thought it bad of Madame de Vernon, to communicate, without my consent, to Madame de Lebensei, the secret of my attachment to Leonce; but the defence which she set up, and which Madame de Lebensei rather aukwardly reported to me, irritated me much more. She grounded her apology on the supposed inclinations of Leonce, on his little regard for women who did not respect the general opinion of the world, the irresolution of his plans respecting me, and the little similarity that existed in our turn of thinking. Madame de Vernon, in fine, as Madame de Lebensei told me, represented herself as having no consideration in view but the welfare, and, perhaps, the inclinations of Leonce. Her employing these pretexts, served only to exasperate me more, and pierce me to the very heart. If, in fact, any person had a due sense of

Madame

Madame de Vernon's injurious treatment of me, perhaps I would myself have softened the expressions of my resentment, and endeavoured to let the blow fall on her as lightly as possible! But the blunt deportment of Madame de Lebensei, her evident prepossessions, the expressions he let drop, which plainly proved to me, that Madame de Vernon had given her reason to think that I was provoked to the highest degree of resentment; all this shew of impartiality, when the question lay between generosity and perfidy, offended me so much, that I lost, I believe, all moderation; and, having described to Madame de Lebensei, with much warmth, my whole conduct, and that of Madame de Vernon, I declared to her, that I would not listen to any person who should speak in her favour; and I begged her only to relate to Madame de Vernon every thing that I had said, and in the very terms and expressions that I had used.

When Madame de Lebensei was gone, I perceived that I had acted wrong. I did not repent of having excited the resentment of Madame de Vernon, nor of having attached Madame de Lebensei more warmly to her interest. It is a sensation not altogether disagreeable to hurt ourselves, by attacking a person, who was once dear to us; we delight in breaking through every restraint and consideration of interest, under the domineering sway of revengeful emotions: but still I repented of having forced my natural feelings, and given scope to injurious expressions, when my sentiments and actions were not in unison with my words. I was moreover, I acknowledge, exceedingly provoked against Madame de Vernon, when I learned that she was still seeking to injure me, and even at the very moment in which I was balancing with myself, whether I should not sacrifice all the happiness of my life to her repose.

However, what will become of me, as long as Leonce shall suspect me? Time and

and solitude will not alleviate this feeling: it will revive every day, for every day I shall reason with myself, and prove that I ought to reply to Leonce. But why imagine that my conscience forbids me? Ah! let me hope that you and M. Barton will agree in your opinion, that Leonce will be calm, and that he will have virtue enough to listen to the truth, without punishing the culprit: ah! did he but know how to pardon, I then might acquaint him with the whole truth!

P. S. You have not answered me on the subject of M. de Clarimin's business: I am assured, that you think with me, in attaching more importance than ever to this business, and prevailing on him to accept my security. If, by accident, you have not yet offered it, the events which have taken place will, I am convinced, suggest to you the propriety of dispatch.

LETTER XXXIII.

MADLLE D'ALBEMAR TO DELPHINE.

Montpellier, November 4.

MY dear Delphine, my beloved pupil, on what a strange world have you fallen? How comes it that Madame de Vernon, that perfidious woman, whom my poor brother detested with so much reason, has captivated you by her seductive arts? Why have I not been able to combine with my affection for you, those amiable talents which delight your imagination? You would then feel the want of no other attachment, and your heart would never have been deceived.

You ask my advice on the conduct which you ought to adopt with respect to Leonce? How shall I venture to give you any counsel? I am of opinion, that you should not, in any sense, sacrifice yourself

for

for the base Madame de Vernon; but when Leonce comes to know, that you have never ceased to love him, will he be able to endure Matilda? Can he bring himself to a resolution never to see you again? Will you have the power to refuse to see him? Moreover, with every means of justification in your power, must you assume the air of the criminal? Must such anxiety and indignity be supported? No:—friendship must never aspire to dictate acts of heroism; if you reply to Leonce, if you acquaint him with the truth, you will, perhaps, do nothing essentially bad, nothing which any rational person would take the liberty to condemn; but if, in order to secure his domestic repose; if, in order to prevent him from pursuing you, you shall continue silent, you will surpass, by many degrees, whatever might have been expected from the severest virtue.

LETTER XXXIV.

M. BARTON TO MADAME D'ALBEMAR.

Mondoville, December 6.

SOME days have elapsed, my dear Madam, before I could determine myself to write to you: the counsel which I intended to give, appeared to me too painful for you to follow; and yet I am resolved to furnish you with the greatest proof of my esteem, by replying with an impartial frankness, to the generous question which you condescend to ask me.

M. de Mondoville having been basely deceived with regard to your sentiments, has married Mademoiselle de Vernon; he has neglected the happiness which I hoped would be his lot, he has ruined his comfort in life, but still he must pay some regard to the duties imposed upon him by his state: he will continue to experience,

rience, at least, a tolerable condition of existence, as long as he shall not have forfeited his own esteem. Without being able to divine the secret so admirably conducted, of which you have been the victim, I could never bring myself to believe that you were capable of deceiving; but I always avoided coming to an explanation with Leonce upon this subject. I have received a letter from him, two days before yours, in which he acquaints me, that he has written to you, and that he has requested of you to reveal to him, what he at length begins to see through, the criminal artifices of Madame de Vernon. He contains himself with you, he tells me; but through his confidence in me, he expresses himself with such fury, that I shudder for the consequences, when he comes to the knowledge of Madame de Vernon's criminal conduct towards him.

His first resolution is to forbid Madame de Mondoville to see her mother, and, in case of her disobedience, he means to separate

parate from her. He forms, moreover, a thousand other extravagant projects of revenge against Madame de Vernon. I am persuaded, that he will renounce every design unworthy of his character; but such as I know him to be, I am sure he will pursue the plan which he announces; that is, to oblige Madame de Mondoville to break with her mother; yet, from this circumstance alone, what trouble will not result?

However guilty Madame de Vernon may be, yet you would pity her, if she were condemned never to see her daughter again; and if, as I have reason to think, Madame de Mondoville will consider it her duty to refuse compliance, what scandal will not arise from the separation of Leonce and his wife, from such a cause as this! It is you alone, Madam, who may be the guardian angel of this family,—the guardian angel even of her who has so cruelly persecuted you.

I shall

I shall not presume to dictate to you, the conduct which you ought to adopt on this occasion; it was my duty only to acquaint you with the disposition and sentiments of Leonce. It is impossible, when once he knows the truth, to flatter ourselves with the idea of appeasing his resentment; he is, unfortunately, very violent in his temper; and never, must we allow, never was any man injured to such a degree in his love, and in his character.

You will be able to judge yourself, Madam, what it may be expedient to conceal from Leonce, you will judge what sacrifices your generous soul may be capable of making! I do not request you to pardon me, for I think I may honour you by my sincerity; as, indeed, you deserve to be honoured, and my respectful admiration adds much force to this expression.

P. Barton.

LETTER

LETTER XXXV.

DELPHINE IN REPLY TO M. BARTON.

Paris, November 8.

YOU do not imagine what uneasiness your letter has given me! I flattered myself that I might be allowed to undeceive him, and that I had reached the happy moment of recovering his esteem. You have pointed out my duty to me, my true duty, which has for its end, to spare the sufferings of others: I recognize it, I submit, and shall not write. Permit me, however, to tell you, that for the first time in my life I felt myself raised to the elevation of virtue: yes, so great a sacrifice is certainly virtue, and the price that it costs me, deserves the suffrage of the virtuous man, and the compassion of Heaven.

He

He expects my answer on an appointed day, on the 25th November. My silence, he says, he will consider an acknowledgement of the perfidy of which I have been accused. Can you not, therefore, write him word, that this silence is a mystery, which I can never explain, but which cannot furnish him with any decisive information? Can you not, at least, tell him that I am departing for Languedoc, from which I shall never again remove? Is this too much? and do not I defeat, by weakness after weakness, the merit of the action which I termed generous?

I leave to your discretion, what you will think proper to say; you are sensible how much I suffer, and what I shall always suffer, as long as he considers me culpable. If Heaven inspires you with the means of relieving me without prejudice to the welfare of others, I am pursuaded you will embrace the offer: if I must be sacrificed, I surrender myself to you, and shall esteem you, for your faithful disposal of my destiny.

destiny. I deposit in your hands, my promise to keep at a distance, to avoid writing, to take no liberty for my own sake, but only to ask you sometimes, if you have softened, in Leonce's heart, the just aversion which, for the second time, he is on the point of feeling for me.

LETTER XXXVI.

MADAME D'ARTENAS TO DELPHINE.

Paris, November 10.

I CALLED at your house yesterday, my dear Delphine, but to no purpose; your door is always shut. I am obliged to set out for my estate in the neighbourhood of Fontainbleau; but I cannot forbear inquiring from you the causes of an incident, which employs the attention of every company in Paris. You have quarrelled

elled with Madame de Vernon, and you ee each other no longer: I am well inlined to believe that she is in the wrong, and of course, that you are in the right. But why quarrel at all with her, or with any body else? It may be attended with very serious consequences.

You have discovered at last, that she had deceived you; had I been in your place, I should have had my suspicions of her a long time ago; but it is precisely because she is of a dexterous, dissembling character, that you ought to have endeavoured to keep on some terms with her. Your conduct has been the reverse of what it ought to be; you ought not to have loved her with so much blindness before your discovery, nor to break with her afterwards with so much violence. Madame de Vernon has been established at Paris a long time before you; she has a greater number of relations there; and you know, that relations in this city always support the cause of each other; not from any affection, but be-

cause

cause they consider it a duty to defend the cause of their kindred. There is so little of true friendship in the world, that it is still more reasonable to rely on the assistance of those who consider themselves bound to defend you, than on those who undertake your cause from a voluntary impulse only. You must find yourself inevitably on bad terms with your family, if you will not consent to see Madame de Vernon; as Madame de Mondoville, on this supposition, will certainly not separate from her mother. Notwithstanding all this, we must strive to reconcile you together: think of the matter as I think of it; but be on good terms with Madame de Vernon, and without any degree of distrust or deceit.

Men are at liberty to quarrel as they like; a dashing duel answers every purpose for them. Such is the magic character of courage, that it escapes with honour from the bonds and links of society; those links which are of the finest and

and most flexible formation, and yet the most difficult to break. A young woman without a father, and without a husband, however distinguished she may be in other respects, has neither any real weight, or any marked and settled rank in the midst of society. You must, therefore, extricate yourself dexterously from every critical situation; govern good sentiments with more scrupulosity than bad; renounce that romantic sublimity, which is only calculated for solitude; and guard, especially, against that thoughtless vivacity, the most engaging of all graces in conversation, but the most dangerous of qualities in point of conduct.

You love, whatever you may say to the contrary, the bustle and variety of society at Paris: learn, therefore, to maintain your rank in that society, without furnishing pretexts to your prejudice to any person. Before the troubles which you have lately met with, you loved likewise, and so you have reason to do, the unexampled

success which attended you wherever you were seen or heard. Be diffident of such success; and let it make you much more prudent: for, by exciting envy, it obliges you to fear such persons as Madame de Vernon. For my own part, I could easily quarrel with her; we are both well matched, old and forgotten as I am; but as for you, the most beautiful, the most youthful, and the most charming of women, the world will easily believe what Madame de Vernon will say about you; and, in order to conceal nothing from you, I must tell you, the world already believes it.

I began my letter with the intention of concealing from you, what Madame de Vernon advances in her own favour; but on farther consideration, I think it reasonable, that you should be acquainted with all the grounds upon which you are to direct your conduct. She gives out, that you had prevailed on her to engage Leonce to marry you, that after the disastrous duel

with

with M. de Serbellane, he would not listen to such a proposal; and that, in consequence of your disappointment, you never would pardon her for her fruitless negociation. She affirms, moreover, that you had circulated horrid calumnies against, and had reproached her with pretended services with much indelicacy and harshness. I leave you to judge how much the ungrateful, and all who wish for an opportunity to be so, are offended at the mention of services which have been rendered to their associates in ingratitude! In short, she assures the world, that it is herself who has come to the resolution of seeing you no more, because you came to her house, only for the purpose of ensnaring the affections of the husband of her own daughter, and this latter charge has rallied all the devotees on her side of the question. You see, that she knows equally well, how to conciliate the good and the bad, and what is more, that numerous class of peaceful indifferents, who having heard much more said about

Madame

Madame d'Albemar than Madame de Vernon, think it suitable to their dignity, as modest and moderate personages, to condemn her who has made most noise in the world.

You must not exaggerate, however, the effect of Madame de Vernon's slanderous language: we are in a state to protect you from her attacks; but it is indispensable, that you should begin by coming to an accommodation with her, and I'll answer for it, that she desires nothing more; because, in every dispute of this nature, before the tribunal of opinion, each party is in secret dread of the other, and both are desirous of an accommodation. Let me advise you then, to return to her suppers, cease to reproach her any more, and say nothing to her prejudice. If she then continues to injure and molest you, I take the charge of your defence upon myself, and pledge my promise to you, to play her some tricks of old woman's warfare. I am well acquainted with Madame de Vernon's stratagems,

stratagems, though without making use of such myself; I know enough of them to be able to unmask them, and I am persuaded, she will endeavour to appease you, when she discovers that your fine and brilliant accomplishments are under the protection of my prudence and reserve. Adieu, my dear Delphine, follow my counsels, and every thing will go on well.

LETTER XXXVII.

DELPHINE TO MADAME D'ARTENAS.

Paris, November 14.

I AM much affected, my dear Madam, with the lively interest you take in my concerns, but I cannot follow the advice you have the goodness to give me. I once loved Madame de Vernon tenderly; and how is it possible for me to renew my attachment

tachment to her, from motives of personal interest and convenience only? It is a species of conduct I am little capable of, even towards indifferent persons; and I should feel an invincible repugnance to degrade the sentiments which I have cherished, by subjecting them to cold calculations of casual convenience. How could I, in the ordinary intercourse of the world, behold with indifference a person who had been the object of my warmest friendship, and who has shewn herself my bitterest enemy? No—Society is not worth the price it would cost, by inflicting such torturing violence on our natural character, and struggles so repugnant would do more than derange the true emotions of the heart, they would finally complete its utter depravation.

I must acknowledge to you, that I am exceedingly hurt by the slanderous insinuations of Madame de Vernon; but it is precisely because her tales are listened to, that I am resolved never to come near her.

I should

I should have been, perhaps, weak enough to desire to do so, if what I think reasonable only had occurred, that is, if she alone was generally blamed; but since she accuses me, and is supported in her charges, since I have still some cause of apprehension from her, it is my fixed resolution never to see her again.

At present, my dear Madam, I wish to justify myself to you alone. As Madame de Vernon has reproached me *with speaking ill of her*, and you advise me *to keep still on terms with her*, I confess I am rather surprised at the expressions, when applied to an attachment of that nature which I felt for Madame de Vernon! Once only have I spoken of her with harshness, in addressing myself to a person whom she esteemed considerably, and by doing so I only contributed to increase her attachment to Madame de Vernon, by the warmth of expression natural to an injured person. You certainly do not love Madame de Vernon, and yet I restrict myself

 from

from speaking to you about her; you, whom I so passionately desire to be enlightened on the absurd calumnies which have been circulated against me.

I have reproached Madame de Vernon with the services I have rendered her; and *every service whatsoever*, she says, *is obliterated by reproaches*. You see plainly, my dear Madam, what an easy matter it would be, in this manner, to get rid, at once, of every sentiment of gratitude. We might wound the hearts of the most generous friends and benefactors; and on their complaining of our conduct, the natural reply would be, that *every act of generosity was done away by words*. This is not the case, however, between me and Madame de Vernon; if I have reproached her with ingratitude, it is the ingratitude of the heart only I accuse her of; and by confounding together, and placing in the same line, the day on which I pressed her hand with tenderness, and that on which I would willingly have parted with half of my fortune for her sake, she has

has compelled me, for my justification, to have recourse to my privilege of bringing to her recollection every former proof and instance of my attachment.

I blush deeply for other charges which she brings against me; but were I to combat them, I should then be truly culpable. I should then really injure Madame de Vernon, and till now you see I have only found out the secret of injuring myself alone, and I applaud myself for the discovery. I am determined not *to keep on terms* with Madame de Vernon, on the motives which you mention: I do not wish to disarm her, but still I should fear to do her prejudice; alas! she will soon discover to what a point I have carried my fears!

My complaints against her, when I do indulge them, are all marked with romantic sensibility, which, you well know, will not associate the world of Paris in my resentment. I am not indifferent to the censures of that world; but I shall not do, in order to escape from them, what I should

do for the satisfaction of my own conscience. Truth ought to acquire us the suffrages of others, or teach us how to do without them.

I should perhaps fix more value on opinion, if I was united with the destiny of a a man who should be dear to me; but being condemned to live alone, and to support my destiny in solitude, I feel no interest in my defence. Who would enjoy my triumph, were I to be successful? And is it not wise, to forbear to struggle against the malice and mischief of mankind, since the only fruit we derive from our exertions, is only a little grief the less? This indifference respecting what may be said to my prejudice is now more easy to me, as I am resolved to leave Paris. I am going to shut myself up for ever in retirement with my sister-in-law; I shall carry thither the tenderest recollection of your goodness, and my regret for not being blessed with a longer enjoyment of it.

DELPHINE D'ALBEMAR.

LETTER XXXVIII.

REPLY OF MADAME D'ARTENAS TO DELPHINE.

Fontainbleau, Nov. 19.

YOU feel too acutely, my dear Delphine, the momentary troubles of life! What sentiments of candour, magnanimity, and goodness, in your letter! but still what impressions of your youth! I do not recollect, to confess the truth, to have had so much sincerity at your age; and yet I am not, thank God, either wicked or treachèrous; but I have lived in the busy world, and am completely undeceived as to the pleasure of being a dupe.

Whatever may happen, I do not mean to require of you what would be too repugnant to your character, and we shall arrive at the same end by a negative conduct. In

the world of Paris, that which is not done, is always as important as that which might be done. You must not pass your whole life in Languedoc, but you may remain there for six months. During this time every circumstance will be forgotten. You have been received with transport on your first arrival at Paris: it is now the turn of envy; when you come back, they will be tired even of envy, and curious to see you again; and as nothing that could be said will have left any trace behind it, it will no longer be kept in memory. It is not for such trivial causes, that reputation is irrevocably lost; and if you had experienced this misfortune, however unjust it would be, your philosophy could never surmount it, nor escape the sharp and pointed shafts of calumny. This, however, is not the question. I pledge myself to repair, this winter, every slander that Monsieur de Serbellane's duel gave birth to, and every addition that Madame de Vernon may have made to it.

All

All I request of you is, to stop a little at my place in the country, which is on the road that leads to Montpellier. My niece, to whom you have been so good, and whom you have made so reasonable, earnestly requests your compliance with our wishes; and I take the liberty to add my authority to her request.

LETTER XXXIX.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Fontainbleau, Nov. 25.

I HAVE already travelled twenty leagues on my way towards you, my dear Louisa; my journey has commenced, and I have left Paris behind me:—I shall never more behold the place where I first knew Leonce: I have left it on the very day when, filled with remembrance of me, he

expects, at the distance of two hundred leagues, the answer which was to justify my conduct—and this answer I have not sent! Ah! why do I not feel, from so great a sacrifice, that repose which may be naturally expected from the satisfaction of my conscience?—Alas! the pangs of love suppress all the pleasing emotions that attend on a satisfactory performance of our duties, and happiness sinks even when virtue supports it in the struggle.—However, it is not for our sole advantage, that so many noble faculties have been bestowed upon us; it is to second the intention of the Supreme Being, by avoiding evil, and by doing good on earth to every creature of his creation.

I felt the loss of M. de Lebensei on quitting Paris; I had seen him on every day that preceded my departure: he seemed to apprehend that my last conversation with his wife might have produced a coolness between me and her, and was eager to bring about an accommodation. I promised

promised to keep up a correspondence with him, for he is a man of so comprehensive an understanding, and has reflected so profoundly on the different emotions and sentiments of the human mind, that perhaps he may calm my troubled heart, by accustoming me to consider life under a more general point of view.

Madame d'Artenas has invited me to pass a week with her on her estate, which is agreeably situated in the middle of Fontainbleau Forest; and I have yielded to her intreaties, and particularly to those of her niece, Madame de R. She has, with the utmost delicacy, avoided seeking my company at Paris, and she seems to consider it a favour if I stay with her; I shall, therefore, suspend the continuation of my journey for another week. Madame de Mondoville came to see me one evening at Paris, when I was at Bellerive; I returned her visit the following morning, but not without being assured beforehand

that she was not to be at home. I was apprehensive of meeting her mother; and I had just reason to dread the emotion I should experience, if I can judge from what I felt from an accidental sight of her once before, since our final separation.

I left Paris this morning in my carriage, provided for the journey, and drawn by post-horses: the postillions, at a turn, drove violently against a chariot with two horses; and being alarmed at the circumstance, I looked out, to see whether it might not be overturned. I perceived, in this chariot, Madame de Vernon alone, with her head reclining on the chariot side. I know not whether it was fancy or reality, but I thought she was very pale and emaciated, and I shrieked with surprise when I saw her pass. She looked at me with an air of tenderness and melancholy; and, shall I own it to you? an involuntary movement impelled my hand to pull the cord of the carriage; but there was not any cord, and the horses had

already

already carried me a hundred paces from her. I peceived from this experience, and by the sensation which I felt the remainder of the day, how prudent I had been in avoiding any further interviews with Madame de Vernon.

The recollection of a long and tender friendship is apt to revive, on the representation if its object being involved in sufferings and misfortunes: but I know that Madame de Vernon feels no regret for me, nor any loss from my absence; and therefore I leave her, without the least doubt of her indifference with respect to me.

LETTER XL.

DELPHINE TO MAD^LLE^ D'ALBEMAR.

Fontainbleau, Nov. 27.

ALAS! my dear Louisa, how little prepared was I for the incident, which compels me to return instantaneously to Paris! The unhappy Madame de Vernon! I feel no longer any traces of my resentment against her—I even reproach myself. . . . . I know not what to say—but I shall feel very unhappy for having quarrelled with her, if I cannot see her once more, to pay every attention to her, and prove that I have forgotten all. I fear to lose a single moment, even with you, my dear Louisa:—I send you Madame de Mondoville's letter, and I depart.

Madame de Mondoville to Madame d'Albemar.

" Paris, Nov. 26.

" I have to announce to you, my dear cousin, a cruel misfortune! This night my mother has been seized with a vomiting of blood, which has not stopped for several hours, and which the physicians believe to be mortal. Her breast having been already much affected, for some months past, by her late hours, the present accident is supposed to be incurable, and her danger seems to be very near at hand.

" She was totally senseless towards the close of last night; and on her recovery, she put some questions to her physician, and having formed a true idea of her situation, she said to him, with an air of calmness and composure: " I feel a pressing necessity, Sir, for a respite of three or four days, to arrange my different concerns: give

give me some remedies that may support me for that time; it matters little, as you perceive, whether they be adapted to the nature of my malady, or not....that is settled, and is out of the reach of recovery. But I request of you, to let me know what must be done, in order to preserve a little strength for me till the last moment, and I shall be extremely grateful for your service." She then turned towards me, and said:—" It is for the purpose of seeing Madame d'Albemar, that I wish to live a few days more. I met her yesterday morning on the road to Montpellier; and I think that a courier may reach her—send one in an instant: I know her heart. I am persuaded she will not hesitate to return; tell her only my present state and my request.—I believe with my mother, my dear cousin, that you are too good to hesitate to comply with the wishes of a dying woman, even though (what I was always desirous of being ignorant of) you may have reason to complain of her. You have not a moment to lose, to give her the satisfaction

satisfaction of seeing you again, and to contribute to the salvation of her soul: for I have no doubt, notwithstanding our difference of opinion, that you will concur with me in the propriety of engaging her to fulfil the sacred duties on which our future happiness depends. This is the first concern I wish to speak to you on, as you can make a greater impression on her than I, if you second my expostulations with her: you do not wish, I am convinced, that my poor mother should die without the benefit of the consolations of religion. I am returning to her now, and expect you with impatience. Had it not been for my reliance on God, I do not know how I could bear this otherwise insupportable affliction. Farewell, my dear cousin: I have this moment requested prayers to be offered up in our convent for my mother; I have succeeded in obtaining them, and shall join them in my fervent devotions. I hope that you will make your own efficacious, by uniting with me in the pious efforts which are prescribed by the religion which we profess."

LETTER XLII.

DELPHINE TO MAD^LLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, Nov 29.

SHE is still alive, my dear Louisa, and that is all that I am able to say. I entertain no hopes; and never shall I feel a greater necessity for them. I am now united again with Madame de Vernon, by sentiments which are not exactly similar to those of former times; but compassion makes them equally tender. Why cannot I prolong her days! If she should finally recover, she would correct her faults, because she would be enlightened by her errors. But, alas! it seems that Nature gives no lesson so terrible as the last, and will not allow those sentiments to be made subservient to the purposes of life, which are inspired only by the near approach of death.

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I have now an opportunity to write to you, while Madame de Vernon is endeavouring to get a little rest. She has been expressly forbidden to speak, a circumstance which obliges me to forego my attendance on her. In the mean time, your feelings will be powerfully interested by the narrative of her conduct on this fatal occasion: you will also, I believe, be struck with the singular letter which she has written to me. I send it to you, and beg you will preserve it. Alas! how unaccountable are the intricacies of the human heart! Moralists are for ever meditating on our passions and characters, and every day some fresh discovery is made which had escaped their observations, and of the effects of which, neither the soul, nor the reasoning faculty, had ever been apprised.

I arrived yesterday at Madame de Vernon's; and, on entering her apartments, I felt a combination of all kinds of emotions mingled together! embarrassment mingled with the most profound pity; a real con-

cern connected with uncertainty in regard to the demonstrations which propriety required me to make. I had learned from the courier, that Madame de Vernon was a little better, but still in great danger. I went up the stairs, trembling, and Madame de Mondoville came to meet me: "My mother has been very impatient to see you," said she to me; "she has been writing to you all day yesterday, although this occupation has been forbidden by her physicians. She has arranged all her affairs. Come, and you will find her more interesting than ever she has been before; but to the present moment I have not been able to bring myself to acquaint her, that she is so dangerously ill as to require the attendance of a confessor. The physicians say, that it would be prejudicial to her, to be alarmed respecting her present state; but who, good Heavens! would have the assurance to spare the body, at the expence of the immortal soul? I must warn you, that I shall put her in mind of this subject, if

if you do not take it on yourself." "Wait a moment, for God's sake," replied I to Madame de Mondoville, till I converse a little with your mother."

Matilda conducted me to the unhappy woman:—the room was darkened; and, through the gloomy glimpse of light that appeared, I perceived Madame de Vernon reclined on a couch, with her hair loose and disordered: she was dressed in white, and covered with a deadly paleness. She perceived the emotion which I felt, and said to me: "Compose yourself, my dear Delphine; it is good for you to be so much affected." I took her hand, and kissed it tenderly: she made me a sign to sit down, and then put to me some indifferent questions about my journey, the place where the courier came up with me, and about the health of Madame d'Artenas, &c. I replied to every thing in monosyllables, not having courage to begin to speak to her about her condition, and suffering nevertheless cruel uneasiness in being forced to take a part in

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a conversation so foreign to the sentiments which engrossed my mind. Her daughter rose, and left us alone: I thought she was going to speak to me with confidence; but she continued to avoid it, and made me acquainted with the particulars of her accident, and its probable consequences; the certainty of her death in three or four days; and all with a simplicity and composure entirely in her usual style and manner; that manner which, whether in seriousness or pleasantry, was irresistibly combined with grace and dignity.

She took up her handkerchief while she was speaking to me, and having applied it to her mouth, replaced it on the table without interrupting her discourse. I saw it covered with blood: I started at the sight, and, reclining my head upon her hand, I burst into tears, calling her several times by the name which I loved to give her— Sophia, my dear Sophia! "Generous Delphine!" said she, "you love me still! ah! that's more sweetly soothing to me than

than life itself. I have written to you," added she, "in order to avoid a conversation which must have been painful to us both. My letter contains every thing I could say; and I have not pretended to justify my proceedings, but to explain my conduct, from a due consideration of my character and disposition. You will not, perhaps, entertain a more favourable opinion of my habitual sentiments, after this explanation; but you will perceive more clearly that they are conformable to human nature: and when I trace the secret causes of apparent wrongs and injuries, you will be a little more indulgent in your censure of them. The immediate favour which I request is, that, when you have read the letter, you will not converse with me on its contents. I have always been apprehensive of violent emotions, and I have not reliance enough on my strength, to abandon myself to my own sensations, or those of others. Repentance only is proper for my present situation, yet I am unwilling to submit to it:

I am better in every respect when I moderate myself, for excess of any kind is very injurious to me. Write me only two lines, which shall tell me, that you still retain a pleasing recollection of our former friendship; and I shall place these two lines upon my breast, already mortally affected; and this remedy will contribute to let me die without a pang." On saying these words, she rung the bell, being as it were apprehensive about my tears and lamentations, and dreading the prolongation of her emotions.

Her women entered, and she gently desired me to retire to my apartment. I went up to a room, which was provided for me, that I might not be under the necessity of quitting the house, and read with heart-felt anguish the letter which is now before you.

Madame de Vernon to Madame d'Albemar.

"DURING the whole course of my life, I have been loved by you alone, though many persons have sought my company, and were delighted with some amiable qualities which I seemed to possess. But you are the only person who has done me real service, without any views of personal interest, without any other design than to second the sentiments of your generosity and friendship. Notwithstanding this, you are that being in the world, to whom I have done the most serious injuries, perhaps you are the only one who has a well-grounded privilege to reproach me with injustice. How then can I explain to you, or even to myself, the grounds and causes of such criminal conduct? The least I can do, will be to reject the gaudy gloss of colouring, and confine myself to the plain simplicity of truth, now for the first time in my life. It is to your under-

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standing only, I shall address this faithful picture of my character; and I shall not make an evil use of my situation, to obtain my pardon for the sympathy it may inspire you with.

"The circumstances which influenced my education have altered my natural disposition: it was originally soft and pliable, and capable, I should imagine, of a happier direction. Nobody took any care of my infancy, when it would have been very easy to form my heart to confidence and affection. My father and mother had died before I was three years old, and they who brought me up deserved no attachment from me. A very distant and indifferent relation was appointed my guardian: he provided me with masters of every description, without giving himself the least concern about my health, or moral qualities. His intentions, I believe, were good; but as his heart did not instruct him, his conduct was directed by accidental recollection, or the occasional bias of temper or inclination:

inclination: he looked, moreover, on women, as playthings in their infancy; and in their youth as mistresses, with greater or less degrees of beauty, and from whom we are to expect nothing reasonable, either in sentiment or conduct.

"I quickly perceived, that the sentiments which I occasionally expressed, were turned into ridicule, and any approaches to sense were silenced and suppressed as foreign to the female character. I therefore kept to myself every sensation that I experienced; I thereby acquired an early habit of dissimulation, and extinguished the sensibility which nature gave me. In the general effort which I made to restrain all my passions, pride alone escaped my vigilance; and when I was surprised in a falsehood, I assigned no motive for it, and, disdaining to attempt an apology, I continued silent; but still I could not help considering it unjust, that they who looked on women as insignificant creatures, who allowed them no privilege, and scarce any faculties, that

 they,

they, I say, should be so unreasonable as to exact from them the virtues of fortitude and independence, of frankness and sincerity.

"My guardian being heartily tired of me, because I had no fortune, came to me one morning, and told me I must marry M. de Vernon. I had only seen him, for the first time, the day before, and had conceived a decided aversion for him; I gave myself to the only spontaneous emotion I had ever displayed through my life, and resisted with violence the resolutions of my guardian. He threatened to shut me up for the rest of my days in a convent, if I presumed to reject M. de Vernon; and, as I possessed nothing in the world, I had no hopes of extricating myself from his despotic authority. I took a calm survey of my own situation. I saw that I was without power, and that a useless struggle was nothing but a childish conduct; I therefore complied, but with a strong sentiment of hatred for the world for not taking my part, and

and for leaving me no resource but in dissimulation alone. From this period, I fully determined to have recourse to it, whenever I should deem it expedient. I was firmly of opinion, that the condition of women condemned them to falsehood; I confirmed myself still more in the idea I had conceived in my infancy, that I was doomed by my sex, and by my want of fortune, to be a miserable slave, who was at liberty to use every stratagem with her tyrannical master. I made no reflexions on morality, because I did not believe that its maxims were applied in behalf of the oppressed. The secret whispers of conscience I did not venture to suppress, and in reality, till the day that I deceived you, I had nothing to reproach myself with on that head.

" M. de Vernon was not, like my guardian, a cold, insensible character, but, above every thing else, he was in continual dread of being governed; and at the same time, he had so strong a tendency to be duped, that he naturally presented a temptation to

deceive him. It was a matter of little difficulty to dupe him; and he had such a repugnance to the most innocent truth, that, in order to speak with sincerity to a man like him, a certain sort of romantic chivalry character was requisite. For fifteen years, I was indebted for all my pleasures to a habit I had acquired of concealing my taste and inclinations; and I concluded, by reducing, as it were, this art into a regular system, considering it as the only means of defence which women can employ against the injustice of their masters.

"I employed so much address to engage M. de Vernon to pass some years at Paris, that he imagined that he settled there in opposition to my inclinations. I loved luxury, and I know nobody who, from taste, fancy, and prodigality, required a larger fortune than myself. M. de Vernon had grown rich by economy: I found means, however, to excite his vanity so skilfully, that, a little before his death, he

was almost ruined, and had contracted, as you know, a considerable debt with Leonce's family. I completely managed M. de Vernon, and yet he always treated me with much harshness: he entertained no suspicion of my influence on his actions; but, in order to prove better to himself that he was master, he constantly spoke to me with rudeness.

"My pride revolted often in secret at the endless stratagems I was compelled to have recourse to, to mitigate the severity of my servitude; but had I separated from M. de Vernon, I should have relapsed into poverty; and I was convinced, that of all humiliations, the most painful to support in the midst of society, is the want of fortune, and the disgraceful dependence which this deprivation carries in its train. Although handsome and lively, I did not wish to encourage lovers; I dreaded the empire of love; I was sensible that love and perpetual dissimulation were things incompatible: I had, moreover, acquired such a

fixed habit of constraint, that no affection could take root in my heart, without my voluntary concurrence. I had a strong sense of the inconveniencies of gallantry; and, not being conscious to myself of those accomplishments which allow or excuse the errors of sensibility, I determined on keeping inviolate the natural means of character and consideration at Paris. I think that nobody understands better than I do, the full value of this consideration, and the elements of which it is composed; but are the connexions of love, at least such as are formed in the general intercourse of the world, are they of more value than the former? I doubt it, and deny it strongly.

"I conceived at first, the idea of bringing up my daughter according to my own ideas, and of inspiring her with my own character; but I felt a sort of disgust in attempting to form another person to the art of dissimulation. I experienced some repugnance to give lectures on my doctrine; my daughter, in her infancy, had shewn

shewn me much attachment, and I was unwilling to let her into the secret of my character, or teach her to deceive. But I was then convinced, and am so still, that women being the victims of every institution of society, are devoted to misfortune, if they once abandon themselves to their sentiments, if they lose, in any sense, their empire over themselves. After mature reflexion, I resolved on giving Matilda, whose character, as I have told you before, discovered at an early period a great share of asperity, the restraint of the Catholic religion; and I applauded my ingenuity, in having discovered a method of submitting my daughter to all the bonds of female servitude, without altering the natural frankness of her character.

"You may see from this declaration, that I was not in love with my own habitual character, although I was convinced, that I could not well do without it.

"M. de Vernon died: the state of his affairs made it impossible for me to continue

at Paris. I was dreadfully afflicted with this circumstance, for I love society, or, to speak more correctly, I do not like solitude. I had never accustomed myself to any occupation, and my imagination is too feeble to furnish me with any amusement in retirement, or any variety from the resources of my own ideas. I love company; I love play, &c. . . . I like all kinds of external bustle, but the idea of internal agitation is odious to me; I am incapable of animated enjoyments, and for this very reason, I hate pain and trouble, and I have always avoided them with constant care, and an unshaken resolution.

"I took an excursion to Montpellier, and then I first became acquainted with you; it is now six years since; you were then sixteen, and I was near forty. M. d'Albemar, who had the care of your infancy, was destined to marry you the following year, although he was already at the advanced age of sixty: this match was extremely displeasing to me, for it deprived

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me of every hope of obtaining any part of the inheritance of M. d'Albemar, and thus putting a period to my pecuniary embarrassment, a circumstance which I dreadfully detest. I felt a considerable dislike to you at first; but I call you to witness, and I have a right to be believed, after so many painful declarations, that you appeared to me extremely amiable, and for the three years I staid at Montpellier, I found in your conversation an inexhaustible source of pleasure.

"However, my heart was no longer accessible to sentiments strong enough to make an alteration in my habits. In order to be loved by a person like you, it was necessary to conceal from you my real character; and I studied yours, in order to adapt my own in appearance to it. This disguise, though intended only to please you, entirely vitiated the charm of our friendship. Your husband died. I had told you, that I desired to finish the education of my daughter at Paris; you made me

an offer immediately to attend me thither, and to lend me forty thousand livres, which were necessary for my establishment in that city. I accepted the favour, and that was the first circumstance that tended to deprave my sentiments of attachment to you.

"You were then so young, and so full of spirits, that I actually considered you as the most amusing and agreeable companion in the world, and from that moment I formed a plan of making you serviceable to me, and with this consideration, I scrupulously scrutinized your character.

"I soon perceived, that you were totally governed by your fine qualities, your goodness, generosity, and confidence, as others are by their passions; and that it was almost as difficult for you to resist your virtuous, and perhaps indiscreet tendencies, as it was for others to combat their vices. The independence of your opinions, the romantic turn of your thoughts and actions, appeared to me in contrast with that circle

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of society, in which your inclinations, your success, your rank and riches must have placed you. I foresaw without difficulty, that your attractions and advantages would naturally inspire sentiments of passion, but would at the same time make you many enemies; and in the struggle you were destined to undergo between envy and love, I thought I could easily have acquired a great ascendancy over you. I had then, I solemnly declare to you, no other intention than employing my influence, to procure our mutual happiness. But the passion you inspired Leonce with, totally changed my disposition. It was an object I had much at heart, to unite him in marriage with my daughter, and I explained to you, at a proper time, all my motives for wishing this event to take place: my motives were of such a nature, that even your generosity could not diminish their influence on my condition. I could not, without this match, be dispensed with from giving an account of

M. de

M. de Vernon's fortune; nor could I settle my daughter according to her reasonable expectations, nor keep up my own establishment at Paris.

"There were some of my debts which I did not own to you, among others, that to M. de Clarimin; I imagined that I might be sure of his silence. I was far from thinking him capable of such conduct as he had adopted with respect to me. I had known him from my infancy; he is the only man that has deceived me, because, on every occasion, he had exhibited himself to me as a person of no morals, and I thought, of course, that he concealed nothing from me. In spite of my usual prudence, I sent him once an angry letter,* which has offended him. One of the inconveniencies attending the habit of dissimulation is this, that a single fault can destroy

* This letter has not been found.

destroy the fruit of the greatest efforts; whereas the natural character carries within itself the means of defence and justification, and the fictitious one may be for a while supported; but, when once it falls, never can be raised again.

"I was much displeased with you, for wishing to take Leonce from my daughter, after we had agreed together on the subject of this match. If I had spoken frankly to you, you would undoubtedly have justified yourself, but I have a particular aversion to explanations. Being decided never to discover to any person my entire thoughts, I detest the moments when every thing must be said: I therefore kept up my resentment against you, and it only became more bitter by being confined within my breast.

"On the day of M. d'Ervins' death, in the moment of the catastrophe of this fatal history, when I had prepared every thing to oppose your marriage, you shewed so much confidence in me, that I was ready

ready to confess to you, the secret plans which were then in agitation; but this was an impulse so contrary to my nature and habits, that I felt, through my whole frame, a sort of rugged reluctance to an attempt of that description. A thousand accidents concurred in forwarding my plans; a letter from Leonce's mother, who, in the most solemn manner, opposed his marriage with you, arrived the day before that on which I was to speak to him. The public was convinced, that it was M. de Serbellane's love for you, that had so violently irritated him at an injurious expression, which M. d'Ervins had addressed to you. What you wrote to Leonce was vague enough to countenance any thing that might have been insinuated, or concealed; and the care you manifested to save Madame d'Ervins' reputation, necessarily compromised you in the public opinion. I saw myself surrounded with fatal facilities for my purpose, which succeeded in producing

ducing a fatal struggle between interest and honour.

"I remained still in a state of uncertainty, I solemnly declare to you, and twice I ordered my horses to be got ready to go to Bellerive. At length Matilda, in a conversation which we had together, on the morning of Leonce's return, told me that she loved him, and that the happiness of her life depended on her marriage with Leonce. I was then decided: I considered, that by giving Matilda hopes of becoming the wife of Leonce, by bringing into her presence every day a young man so remarkably accomplished, I had contracted an obligation to unite her to him, and that I was only acquitting myself of the duty of a mother, in employing every possible means to determine Leonce to marry her.

"To this consideration, I added an opinion, which will be inexcusable in your eyes, but of which I still entertain a deep conviction, which is, that the character of

of Leonce is not calculated to make you happy. I know that he has some fine qualities; in which you resemble each other, but I have observed him closely, even during that conversation, by which I have merited all my misery for betraying your confidence; it was not jealousy alone, which operated on him; I exerted a mighty influence over the emotions of his soul, by declaring to him, that the opinion of the world was against you, and that he would be exposed to censure for seeking an alliance with a woman who had so publicly committed herself. Every time that I appealed to this circumstance, in order to bring him to a final decision, I brought a blush into his face, and an agitation which would not have been calmed, had he ever learned that appearances alone were against you.

"You are now acquainted, not with my excuse, but with the explanation of my conduct. My greatest guilt was extorting from Leonce his consent, and

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dragging him to church before you had time to see each other. For this, I have been well punished; the result for me has been nothing but trouble on account of this unhappy marriage; my daughter has removed from me, and she has never been willing to follow my directions. I have given myself up to an anxiety and concern, which suspend the restless agitation of my soul; I have engaged at play; I have kept late hours: I was sensible, that by such conduct, I was abridging my days, but the idea was not very uncomfortable to me. I dreaded every instant, that chance might bring about an explanation between you and Leonce. If I then exerted myself to prevent it, it was, above all, with the hope of preserving, or even defrauding you of your friendship, which I merited no longer. The marriage, which I was desirous of, was concluded; but it was requisite that the absence of Leonce should allow me time, to engage you to forget him, and perhaps then you

would have strengthened yourself by other connections, which would make you more indifferent respecting the means employed to bring about a rupture between you and M. de Mondoville. During two months, while he deferred the journey which she intended, I knew every thing you were both employed about, in order that I might take the necessary precautions to prevent an explanation, which I mortally dreaded. Your character, and that of Leonce, made this an easy enterprise; you were engaged with M. de Serbellane, on account of Madame d'Ervins, without reflecting that at your age you might have done serious injury to your reputation; and Leonce is not only of a jealous character, but is likewise very susceptible with regard to the errors a woman may commit with regard to himself, or those she may be exposed to in the eyes of others; from which it is easy to take advantage of him, even against a woman he might love. At length, Leonce

set out for Spain; you proposed to me to go with you to Montpellier; and, thinking myself certain, as Leonce was absent, of being able to preserve your friendship, I returned to you, from my heart and soul, with the most lively tenderness I ever felt for any person whatsoever. When I accepted from you a fresh service, I was worthy to receive it; I entertained more flattering hopes of happiness than I ever had before in my life. My health was recovering; and the hopes of passing the rest of my days with you, revived my sinking soul: it was then that a child discovered that most artful and best concealed secret; and it was the punishment of a woman who thought herself a mighty adept in dissimulation, to be defeated by a child, when she had succeeded in deceiving men.

"This event has killed me; the complaint of which I am going to die, proceeds from the same cause. You have been offended, and with reason, by the manner I conducted myself

myself when every thing was discovered; but as our connexion could subsist no longer, I wished to avoid any painful scenes. The more culpable I felt myself, the more I suffered, and the more I wished to conceal it from you. You might have ruined me in the opinion of Leonce; I did not seek to soften you by submission; I might, it is true, confide in your generosity; but do not spurn the little good that I can say of myself—it is, I declare, because I loved you still, that it was impossible for me to implore your compassion.

"It was not convenient for me, as long as I continued to live in the world, that the real cause of our separation should be known. I found myself engaged to follow the natural bent of my character, and to employ art in my defence; however, this character experienced a great change in the secrets that concerned myself; but after forty years, habits direct us still, although our sentiments may be no longer in unison with

with them. In order to correct the faults of a whole life, either long reflexions, or violent agitations, are necessary; a repentance of a few days can never produce this effect.

"When I met you the day before yesterday, at the moment of your departure, when I was witness to the soft and sensible look you cast on me, I felt an emotion so profound and violent, that it accelerated greatly the end of my life. I wished to have stopped at that instant, to reveal my secrets to you; but the approach of death was requisite to give me confidence to speak of myself. I am timid, notwithstanding the presence of mind which I have always displayed; my character is full of pride, though my conduct has been subtle, and dissembling; there is an indescribable contrast in me, which has often prevented me from indulging the emotions of goodness which I felt at different times.

At length, I am going to die, and all this life of efforts and calculations is already

ready finished; I enjoy these last moments, during which my mind has no peculiar object to attain. I imagined, some time ago, that I alone understood what life was, and that all those who spoke to me of devoted attachments and exalted virtues, were either dupes or impostors. Since I have known you, I have had, at intervals, ideas somewhat different; but I do not know, whether my callous system be totally erroneous, and if it be true with every other person besides you, the only reasonable relations are then the relations of interest. Whatever may be said, I do not think that I deserve to be called vicious; I always had a bad opinion of men, and armed myself before-hand against their malicious intentions; but I had no asperity in my nature. I made all my inferiors very happy, and all who were dependent on me; and when I employed dissimulation towards those who had some authority over me, it was only for the purpose of making their lives more happy. I have been

been unjust towards you, my Delphine, towards you, whom, I repeat it again, I have loved with the utmost tenderness. What unaccountable contradictions! Why did I not yield to the impression you naturally made on me? I resisted it as a sort of folly, as a weakness that counteracted a systematic, political life, like mine, though this sentiment would have equally served my interest and happiness.

"In this letter I have expressed every thing, and I have not exaggerated the motives which might excuse me. I have assigned due weight and rank to my sentiments for my daughter, and my own personal considerations; believe me, then, on the only consideration have left, believe that I die in loving you. During my life, I have entertained a profound contempt for mankind, and a great share of incredulity on the score of virtue in general, as well as attachment and affection! You are the only person in the world whom I have found at once superior and natural, simple in

manners, generous in sacrifices, constant and warm in attachment, sensible as the most accomplished, confidential like the best; in short, a creature so good, and so tender, that, notwithstanding so many unbecoming declarations, it is on you that I rely to shed some tears upon my tomb, and to preserve some faint recollection of me, connected with tenderness and compassion.

"SOPHIA DE VERNON."

What an extraordinary letter is that which you have now read, my dear Louisa! Does it not increase your pity for the unhappy Sophia! What a cold, constrained life has she not led! what shame, and what sorrow is not the result of habitual dissimulation! How can I inspire her with any of those sentiments, which alone can support us in the last stage of life! Oh! I pardon her from my heart; but I wish that her soul may repose on the ideas that may elevate

elevate it to her God. I am now returning to her, and shall write to you to-morrow.

LETTER XLII.

DELPHINE TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, November 31.

MADAME de Vernon has been this day truly sublime: the more her danger increases, the more elevated she feels her soul. Alas! might she live still longer, she would display, I am certain, an example of every virtue, for the remainder of her life. Her daughter, who staid up with her the night before, came to my apartment this morning, and told me that her mother was worse than on the preceding day, and that there was no further reason for hope. "It is absolutely necessary," added she, "that you

you should speak to her about the necessity of submitting to the duties of her religion. I conjure you to have the courage to do so: it will have the more weight with her, with your opinions, than with mine; and you will spare me the most cruel of all misfortunes, in saving my poor mother from the perdition that threatens her. My confessor is in the house: he is a priest of exemplary devotion; he prays for us in my apartment, and has already said mass, in order to obtain from Heaven, that my mother may die in the bosom of our holy church; but what avail his prayers, unless my mother's are united with them? My dear cousin, persuade her; whatever reply she may make, I am determined to speak to her, it is my duty: but if she was well prepared; if she knew that a person so philosophical.....I do not say so to offend you, you may be assured; but I think, if she knew that a woman of the world, like you, was of opinion that she should conform to the duties of her religion, perhaps she

she would not be restrained by the false vanity which hardens her resolution. I conjure you, my dear cousin...." and she too pressed my hand with a degree of earnestness, which I had never seen her manifest on any former occasion.

I repeated to her my promise, that I would speak to Madame de Vernon on this subject. In fact, I thought it due to that respect which ought to be shewn to ceremonies of a religion generally professed. It had ever been my opinion, that even the groundless scruples of those to whom we are attached merit some consideration. I therefore intreated Matilda to conduct herself with all the mildness in her power; to do what duty called on her to perform, but to be careful of unnecessarily wounding the feelings of her mother. I went down stairs to the room where Madame de Vernon was, where I found Madame de Lebensei. Madame de Mondoville, as soon as she perceived her, withdrew, and did

did not enter the apartment. Madame de Lebensei left me alone with Madame de Vernon, promising, as she left the room, to return the same evening, to pass the night with her along with me. "Well!" said Madame de Vernon to me, taking hold of my hand, "a word to you on the subject of my letter. I now stand greatly in need of your support:" "Sophia," said I "pray Heaven may again restore you to health, and I am confident your heart will return to all the feelings for which it was naturally formed." "Alas!" replied she, "as to life, I have done with it; but if your friendship continues unshaken, I shall consider myself less criminal, and I will die with greater composure." "Undoubtedly it continues unabated," said I, "and for you I still entertain the tenderest affection. The recollection of the past for ever holds a place in our souls, and nothing can ever efface it. It keeps its place at the bottom of the heart, even

even when we think it has lost all its influence over us. Judge, then, what I feel, when I behold your present sufferings, when I see the strength of your attachment to me; when I perceive you ready to become all that nature designed you should be." "Amiable friend," interrupted she, "your words are of the most consolatory nature; and I shall die with greater tranquillity than I deserve."

"I have still," said I, "a most painful duty to perform to you; but you have so much strength of mind, that I am not afraid of presenting to you ideas which would shake the firmness of women of a less vigorous character. Your daughter is extremely desirous that you should fulfill the duties which the Catholic religion imposes on those looking forward to the prospect of dissolution. To these duties she attaches the highest importance, and, in my opinion, you ought to yield to her anxiety on this point.

point. Besides you will afford a valuable example, by conforming yourself at this solemn moment to the practices which edify the faithful. The greater part of the world will consider it as a proof of your respect for morality and the approbation of the Divine Being. Madame de Vernon hesitated for a few moments before she gave me an answer. She at length said to me, "My dear Delphine, I cannot yield to your request. Dissimulation was the vice which, throughout life, sullied my character. I do not wish that the last act of my existence should be marked by a similar stain. I have always blamed the ceremonies of the Catholic religion: they have in them something so gloomy and terrible, that they do not accord with any ideas I have formed of the goodness of the Parent of Nature. I have, besides, an invincible repugnance to disclose the secrets of my heart to a priest; indeed, to no other being but yourself could I reveal the inmost feelings of my soul. I feel that it would

would be impossible for me to speak with confidence to a man, of whom I am ignorant, or to receive consolation from that voice to which my heart had previously been a stranger. I believe, if I were forced to see a priest, I would reveal to him none of my secret actions or thoughts. I would have the appearance of making a confession, and confess nothing. I would thus, therefore, assume the false appearance of a fault which I did not possess. I have too long been conversant in hypocrisy; and I do not wish to interrupt the enjoyment (alas! too late experienced), which sincerity affords. This repugnance does not spring from my rejection of religious ideas; for, on the contrary, my heart receives them with rapture; and, from your kind assistance, my dear Delphine, I trust they will continue to yield me support: but if, with impressions which I really feel, I endeavour to mingle those which I do not experience, the source of that voluntary emotion which you have excited in me will be destroyed.

destroyed. As Madame de Lebensei wishes to set up with me to-night, my daughter will seize that opportunity of taking some repose. Continue with me, my dear Delphine, and consecrate those moments which may, perhaps, be the last of my being, to the task of inspiring my soul with all those feelings and ideas, which will at once give it new strength, and melt it into new tenderness. But have the goodness to announce to my daughter my resolution, which is irrevocable." I knew the inflexible character of Madame de Vernon: to have insisted further, would have been useless; and I promised to act as she desired.—"Follow, my dear Sophia," said I, "follow the impulses of your heart! When these are pure, they are all raised to that deity, who manifests himself to us in every virtuous emotion of our souls."

"I have been occupied," added Madame de Vernon, "about all those interests which depended on me. I have, as far as it was in my power, secured all the claims you have

have on my fortune. I have regulated, with the utmost care, the interests of my daughter; and what was a duty still more imperious, I have written a letter to Leonce, containing a general detail of the injuries I have unhappily been guilty of to you both. This letter will also inform him of the services you have rendered me. I have informed him in short, that it is to your generosity that my daughter owes the estate which constituted her dowry. This letter will be carried, by one of my domestics, to the courier of the Spanish Ambassador, and in eight hours your conduct will be fully justified to Leonce. I have left it to him to consult you, whether I am deserving of pardon. I have not ventured to introduce into this letter any thing calculated to soften his resentment. My pride suffered a good deal, I confess, at making these confessions, so humiliating to one who never esteemed me, and who will feel, in the perusal of this letter, the strongest emotions of indignation. This

idea, which was never absent from my mind, may, perhaps, have led me to employ expressions much too cold for the strength of my feelings. But it is to you, it is you alone, that I fully confide my repentance. I have not informed Leonce what the present state of my health, but of this my death will ere long apprise him. I have not recommended to him, the happiness of Matilda; a prayer from me could only produce irritation: but it is into your hands, my dear Delphine, that I commit the fate of my daughter. Assuredly, it is not for me, to offer counsels to goodness itself; I have only, therefore, to conjure you to satisfy yourself, with recovering the esteem and admiration of Leonce, and not to revive a sentiment, which could only involve those beings in absolute misery."

"We shall go together, I hope," answered I, "to the solitude of my sister-in-law, according to the plan we have formed, and never will I quit that sacred retreat."

"We

"We shall go! — alas! that word no longer accords with my situation. But I dare still hope," exclaimed Madame de Vernon, clasping her hands together, with the most ardent emotion—"I dare still hope, that Heaven will repair the ills which I have occasioned you, and grant you many days of future bliss. Your sister-in-law has reason to hate me; soften this sentiment so far, as that she may sometimes be able patiently to hear you talk with affection of your criminal friend."—She continued a long while conversing with me, with the same sweetness, the same tranquillity, and the same anticipation of death. It seemed as if this conviction had divested her mind of all those false ideas, which she had resolved into a system. Now natural qualities regained their empire: she felt delight in the virtuous sentiments to which she resigned herself; and though to find her restored to this situation, augmented my regrets, I experienced a sort of happiness, in having it in my

my power, once more to esteem her: I elt a gratification, not to be described, in the feelings which the serenity of her aspect inspired, and I could now think of her without blushing, that I had loved her with such tenderness of affection. Though I despaired of her recovery, the length of the conversation was painful to me, as it was expressly contrary to the orders of the physicians; I put her in mind of this repeatedly, and wished her to spare herself this fatiguing exertion. "What," said she to me, "do you not see that I have scarcely twenty-four hours to live? I have had but three days, during which I have enjoyed any thing like peace of mind: suffer me then to unbosom to you all my thoughts, to learn from you, whether they are consistent with virtue, whether they are worthy of that protecting God, whom you supplicate in my behalf, with that angelic voice, which cannot fail to ascend with acceptance to his throne. "But come," added she, "go

and

and take some repose: you will in a few hours return to my apartment. The manners of Madame de Lebensei, who returns to-night, please me, and she appears to be attached to me: my daughter, alas! I have merited what I now suffer, the want of all confidence between us! Adieu, for a little, Delphine! my dear child, adieu." She uttered these words in the same accent, and with the same gestures, which distinguished her when possessed of all her wonted grace and accustomed health. This ray of life, penetrating through the cloud of dissolution, affected me extremely, and I withdrew, to conceal my tears. On recovering myself, I found Matilda waiting for me: it was necessary to inform her of her mother's refusal. She discovered a degree of grief which touched my heart very sorrowfully; but when she began to explain what she thought her duty called on her to do, I had to combat projects the most violent and unfeeling; she frequently expressed her ardent desire to see her

her mother, to introduce the priest to her on his arrival, and at any price to save her soul from destruction: she accused Madame de Lebensei of all, and thought it inconsistent with her duty, to approach the bed of a dying mother, whose expiring moments were soothed by the tender assiduities of a woman, who had been divorced. What do I say! her discourse was a mixture of all that a contracted spirit, under the guidance of fanatical superstition, can produce in a character not naturally depraved, but destitute of a heart sufficiently feeling to triumph over its errors. But it is not her opinions alone that deserve censure. Has not Theresa opinions of a similar kind? But her mild and tender character, opposes to their influence, feelings of the most endearing nature. It was in vain, that for a whole hour, I employed all the arms of reason to convince Matilda of her error. Her mind was impregnable to every remon-

strance.

strance.* I should have made no impression if I had still continued endeavouring to persuade her. I happily, however, at length bethought myself of proposing a delay of twenty-four hours; to this proposal she immediately acceded, and in all probability it relieved her from a great deal of internal embarrassment.

Alas! who knows whether Sophia will be alive for twenty-four hours? I will not leave her for a moment, lest Matilda, recurring to her former ideas, should torment her during my absence.

Though I take a very lively interest in the situation of Madame de Vernon, there is one idea which is constantly recurring to my mind. Seven days have elapsed, since Leonce expected my justification, and why has he not received it? In eight hours he will be informed of all, by the letter

* She had got hold of one phrase, which signified nothing, but it was sufficient to support her in her obstinacy.

letter of Madame de Vernon. With what impressions will he receive it? What sentiments will he entertain of me? I shall not be informed. I have no right to be informed on these points, so connected with my repose. Adieu, my dear sister. Alas! my journey will not long be delayed, and the poor Sophia shall have ceased to live, before Madame de Mondoville has been able to answer her letter.

LETTER XLIII.

MADAME DE LEBENSEI TO MADLLE D'ALBEMAR.

Paris, Dec. 2.

WHAT an afflicting scene, Mademoiselle, am I called upon to describe to you! Madame d'Albemar is now in the height of

of a raging fever, and I myself have scarcely strength enough to perform the duties which my friendship for you, and for her, imposes on me. You condescend, she has told me, to think of me with interest, and it is perhaps to you that I am indebted for that friendship I experience from that perfect creature. Now then, can I ever make a sufficient return for such a service? What a scene! what a character! and can it be possible that circumstances the most disastrous may deprive such a woman of every hope of felicity?

Madame de Vernon is no more; at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, she expired in the arms of Delphine. An unhappy fatality spread the most gloomy influence over her departing moments. I will endeavour, as far as I am able, to give you an account of the events of the last twelve hours, in the order they occurred; they never can be effaced from my memory. Pardon my emotion, if I am unable to resist its power.

Madame

Madame d'Albemar went down again to the chamber of Madame de Vernon. She found her reposing on a long chair; her weakness and suffering had not allowed her to continue in bed, the mortal paleness of her countenance would have led one to think that she had ceased to live, had not her eyes, from time to time, kindled as she lifted them up to look on Delphine. Delphine sought in the writings of ancient and modern moralists, of divines and philosophers, for whatever was most calculated to support a spirit sinking under the terror of approaching dissolution. The chamber was fully illuminated, and Madame d'Albemar was sitting beside a lamp whose shaded light shed over her countenance something that was mysterious. She was peculiarly animated while reading those works in which souls of sensibility and minds possessed of high elevation have deposited their generous thoughts. You know her enthusiasm for whatever is grand and noble: this habitual

disposition was increased by her anxiety to make a profound impression on the heart of Madame de Vernon. Her voice, at all times touching, had in it something of solemnity. Often she raised looks to heaven, worthy of the purest adoration. Her uplifted hand took the Divine Being to witness the truth of her words, and her whole attitude had in it a grace and a majesty altogether inexpressible.

I know not where Delphine found what she said; perhaps it was the effect of inspiration; but never was death sustained by calmer images, by more pleasing ideas; never was a greater force given to those feeling and religious impressions which sweetly lead the departing spirit from the feeble rays of expiring life to the darkness of the tomb.

On a sudden, at some distance from the house of Madame de Vernon, a window opened, and we heard the sounds of melodious music. From the time of the night, and the stillness of all surrounding nature,

it

it seemed to come from a fête that was still protracted. Madame de Vernon who had hitherto been very composed, burst into tears at this idea. The same emotion seized Delphine and me; but recovering herself first, and taking Madame de Vernon's hand, she said to her with tenderness: "Yes, my dear friend, in that habitation, nothing is known but pleasure, whilst this is the house of sorrow; but a few years and all pass away, and those who now rejoice shall mourn, and the soul reconciled with its God, as with itself, shall know suffering no more for ever."

These words had the effect of restoring Madame de Vernon to composure, and almost at the same moment the sound of the music ceased. What a picture was that which I witnessed! Reproach, singularly remarkable, heightened its effect. I heard from Madame de Vernon herself, that, on many occasions, she had cruelly injured Madame d'Albemar; and I reflected on the combination of circumstances which gave

Madame de Vernon, so much courted, and so much admired in the world, as her only support, her only friend, in her dying moments, the very woman whom she had wounded in all that is dearest to the heart.

When Madame de Vernon wished to speak to Delphine of her repentance, she gently declined this conversation, talked to her of her friendship for her, with a delicacy and a propriety which banished the remembrance of her conduct, and fixed the mind only on the contemplation of her amiable qualities. Delphine assiduously gave to her expiring friend the momentary relief which alleviated her sufferings. She gently replaced her on the sofa, asked her about her complaints with the most delicate attention; and, without betraying her fears, she discovered the extent of her pity. The genius of goodness inspired Delphine; and her figure, rendered more interesting by the emotions of her soul, gave such an unaccountable charm to her actions that I

was

was almost tempted to ask, whether some miraculous change had been effected in her nature. But this miracle was nothing more than the astonishing union of sensibility and of grace, of genius and of beauty.

Poor Madame de Vernon! she had at least enjoyed a few hours of repose; and, during the night, I had observed on her countenance an expression more calm and more pure than in the gayest moments of her existence. I hope that her soul has not lost the fruit of that noble enthusiasm which Delphine had inspired. At length the morning began to dawn. It was one of the darkest and coldest days of winter. It snowed heavily, and the cold that was felt within added to the horror by which this afflicting day was to be distinguished. Madame de Vernon was gradually becoming more weak, and her vomiting of blood became more frequent and more overwhelming. I was convinced that even, if she had escaped the cruel sufferings she had endured, it was impossible for her to survive another day.

The

The physician came, and Madame de Mondoville arrived soon after. I must do her the justice to say, that her countenance was greatly altered: she seemed to have been weeping much. Madame de Vernon remarked the change in her appearance, and received her very affectionately. The physician, having made the necessary inquiries respecting the situation of Madame de Vernon, who, on her part, never put a question to him, left the room in company with Madame de Mondoville. It is probable, he informed her, that her mother had only a few hours more to live. Matilda's confessor, who has neither the moderation nor the liberality of some men of his class, then took advantage of her blind zeal, and prevailed on her to conduct him to her mother, notwithstanding that Madame de Vernon had refused to see him.

Madame d'Albemar and I trembled when we saw Matilda enter the room, accompanied by her priest; but it was now too late to interrupt her. She addressed

 Madame

Madame de Vernon with great emotion. "Mother," said she, "if you would not make me die of grief, do not reject those heavenly admonitions which can alone save you from eternal torments.—I conjure you, in the name of God and Jesus Christ, do not reject them." On concluding these words, she threw herself on her knees before her mother.——"Fool!" exclaimed Delphine, "do you imagine that you serve the Supreme Being, by exciting the most painful feelings in the breast of your mother?"—"You ruin my mother's soul," replied Matilda with indignation; "you destroy her Delphine with your pusillanimous conduct, your uncertainties, and your doubts; and you, Madame," said she, turning to me, "you also are the enemy of her happiness, because you wish to discard that religion which condemns yourself.—I heard these words without the smallest anger; so much was I affected by the situation of Madame de Vernon, and the anxieties of Delphine. I remarked, how-

however, a very striking expression in the countenance of Madame de Vernon, who, soon after, pronounced the following words with an energy which, in her situation, was truly extraordinary.

"——Daughter," said she to Matilda, "I pardon your inconsiderate zeal: I ought to pardon you, for I have been much to blame in not educating you myself. I have neglected to improve your mind, and no intimate relations of confidence have existed between us. I consulted your interests, but I never cultivated your understanding. I am now punished for my misconduct, since, at this awful moment of death, our hearts are separated. Alas! the mother and the daughter are incapable of one common feeling, even when they have to bid each other an eternal adieu!

"But, Sir," said she, addressing herself to the priest, who remained at the bottom of the room in a grave attitude, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and had not yet offered to speak a word—"why, Sir, have

you used the ascendancy you possess over the weak mind of my child, to expose her to the greatest of evils, that of afflicting a dying mother? I respect religion; my heart is filled with the love of a beneficent God, and his goodness inspires me with the hope of another life: but when about to appear before him to whom all truths are known, I should act a very bad part, were I to disguise my thoughts by external ceremonies inconsistent with my opinions. I choose rather to confess my heart to God than to you, whom I know not, or any other priest with whom I am not connected by the ties of friendship or confidence. I am more certain of the sincerity of my regret than the frankness of my confessions. No man can inform me whether God will pardon me: the voice of my conscience is a better monitor than you. Leave me, then, to die in peace, surrounded by the friends with whom I have lived, and whose happiness has already suffered too much from my conduct; but

if they are reconciled to me, if they are touched by my repentance, they will implore the Divine Mercy in my favour, and, in the hope that their prayers will be heard, I wish for none from others. This angel, pointing to Delphine, this angel whom I have so much injured, will intercede for me with the Supreme Being. Retire, then, Sir; your ministry is finished, when you cannot convince. Were you to resort to any other means to obtain your object, you would disgrace the sanctity of your mission."

When Madame de Vernon concluded, the priest fell upon his knees; and, after kissing the cross which he wore on his breast, said, in a tone of solemnity, but which appeared to me formal and affected, "Accursed is the man who seeketh to fathom the ways of Christ, and despiseth his authority! Wretched is the sinner who dieth impenitent."—He then made a sign to Matilda, and they both departed in the most profound silence.

I know not whether Madame de Mondoville retained the priest in order to bring him back to her mother, when she should no longer have sufficient strength to oppose such a proceeding; or whether she thought that it would be most efficacious to perform divine service for her while she was still living; but she shut herself up in her apartment, where she joined in prayers with her confessor and some domestics attached to the same opinions. In this manner she separated herself from her mother in her last moments, and neglected to bestow on her that care which filial duty would have dictated. A strange mixture of superstition and obstinacy, and a mistaken love of duty combined in her soul, with a real affection for her mother; but the bitter and cruel proofs she gave of that affection proved the torment of both. However, it was owing to this singular absence from her mother's chamber that Matilda avoided a scene which would have for ever

ever deprived her of repose and happiness.

The effort made by Madame de Vernon, and the emotion she had experienced, affected her so greatly as to produce a terrible vomiting of blood, after Matilda and her confessor left the room; she fainted at length in the arms of Madame d'Albemar. Our cares again recalled her to life; Delphine, infinitely alarmed by this accident, which we thought was the last, threw herself on her knees before the bed-chair on which her dying friend sat, and inclined her face on Madame de Vernon's hands, endeavouring to restore the vital heat which had abandoned them. Her fine fair hair loosened, and fell down in disorder . . . . . At this moment I heard two doors open with a violence very remarkable in a house where the greatest precautions had been taken to prevent the least noise which might disturb Madame de Vernon. I also heard the sound of the

 footsteps

footsteps of some person who advanced with great precipitation. I arose, and saw Leonce enter with a letter in his hand—it was that in which Madame de Vernon had explained her conduct. He trembled with rage; he was pale with cold; and his whole appearance was that of a man who had just made a long journey. Indeed he had juſt arrived from Madrid, having travelled during seven days and seven nights in the midst of winter, without taking any rest. Distracted by phyſical and moral pain, and agitated by a thousand feelings, he entered Madame de Vernon's house, without speaking a word to any individual.

Delphine, having turned round her head, screamed on observing Leonce, and extended her arms towards him, without knowing what she did. This movement, and the alteration in the looks of Delphine, almost completed the derangement of Leonce's mind. Seizing Delphine eagerly by the arms, as if he would

have pulled her away, and addressing himself to Madame de Vernon, whose face was concealed from him by a curtain half drawn before her bed-chair, he exclaimed, " What are you doing to this unfortunate . . . . . What new scheme of perfidy are you employing againſt her? This letter which you addressed to me in Spain, I received, while coming here, from the courier entrusted with it. I received it while I was hastening to procure explanations respecting those tormenting doubts which the silence of Delphine and the letter of a friend had excited in my mind. Here is the letter which contains the recital of your barbarous deceptions. I was not to receive it, you said, until after the departure of Delphine; was this a new trick, contrived to prevent my return, and to involve the unfortunate Delphine in some snare during my absence?" " Leonce," said Madame d'Albemar, " how unjust and cruel you are! Do you not know that Madame de Vernon is dying?"

 —" Dy-

——"Dying!" replied Leonce; "no, I do not believe it: she may feign, to interest your feelings. Will you allow yourself to be again deceived by the detestable address of this woman? You wrote to me, Delphine, that I might rely on what Madame de Vernon told me; and she took advantage of this proof of your confidence to persuade me that you loved M. de Serbellane, while you were a generous victim, sacrificing yourself to the reputation of Madame d'Ervins! Ah! Delphine, you supposed I was informed of the truth; you must then have thought that I was the weakest, the most ungrateful, and most insensible of mankind, that I blamed you for your virtues, and abandoned you on account of your misfortunes. I have faults, and they have been made use of, to make it probable that I should conduct myself with the greatest cruelty towards the best, the most amiable of beings. Still this is not all—an obstacle arising from want of fortune separated me from Matilda, and that

obstacle was removed by Delphine, who thus gave the example of the most unbounded generosity, and became the victim of the most shameless ingratitude. I was kept ignorant of this service, and she was punished for having performed it.—All is mystery around me. I am beset by falsehoods; and when I learn that I am loved, that I have always been loved (said he, in accents which would have rent your heart); I am bound, irrevocably bound! I see the being I adore, the object of my eternal affection! She extends her arms towards me—her countenance is impressed with grief, and yet I cannot relieve her! I repulsed her, when she seemed to advance towards me, when perhaps she shed tears of sorrow for my mistake—and it was you!" exclaimed he, turning again to Madame de Vernon, "it was you . . . . ."

I felt the deepest compassion for the inexpressible anguish of this unfortunate woman; and Delphine, who suffered still more from her feelings, exclaimed, "Stop,

 stop,

stop, Leonce! An unfortunate accident has brought her to the brink of the grave. Oh! if you knew by how many affecting and sincere regrets she has since endeavoured to repair the fault which maternal love induced her to commit." "She will be well punished," cried Leonce, "if it was her daughter she wished to serve: she shall reproach her both for her own misfortunes and mine. Break, perfidious woman, said he to Madame de Vernon, break the chain which your falsehoods have forged: restore to me the happy day which preceded that on which I first heard your deceitful tongue; on which I still was free to espouse Delphine; restore it to me———" "Oh, Leonce!" replied Madame de Vernon, "do not pursue me into the grave: accept my repentance——"Be again yourself," said Delphine, interrupting her, and addressing Leonce, "look at the situation of this unfortunate woman: can you be inaccessible to pity?"——"Why pity?" resumed he, with a ferocious wildness; "pity for what? For her?

her? Ah! if she be really dying, Heaven grant that I might change conditions with her; that I were placed on her bed of pain, regretted by Delphine, and that she wore in my stead the chains with which she has loaded me! She would then repay that long destiny of pain to which her profound dissimulation has condemned me." Barbarian!" exclaimed Delphine, "what must be done to soften you; to obtain one kind word, which may console the last moments of the poor Sophia! Do you think that I have not also suffered? Since I lost the hope of being united to you, I have seen no day on which I did not hate to live. I beg of you, by my tears——" "By your misfortunes, which she has caused," interrupted Leonce, "what do you ask of me?——"

Delphine was about to answer him; but Madame de Vernon, arising like a spectre from the tomb, and supporting herself on me, signified, by a sign, that she wished to speak. As she advanced, supported

ported on my arm, she came out of the recess in which her bed-chair was placed, and her whole body was in the light. Leonce was struck with her melancholy state, of which he was not able to judge before. This spectacle instantly calmed his fury. He sighed, cast down his eyes, and I saw, even before Madame de Vernon began to speak, that the whole disposition of his soul was changed.

"Delphine," said Madame de Vernon, "ask not of Leonce a pardon which he cannot grant me, since his whole heart disavows it: I have merited the punishment which he has made me experience. You wished, my dear Delphine, to render the close of my life too happy; I was not sufficiently afflicted: but prevail on him only to promise, that he will not render Matilda miserable. Let my faults be buried with me; but, oh! let not their consequences make my memory odious. Prevail on him, I beseech you, to conceal from Matilda the history

tory of his marriage and his love for you." "To whom," replied Leonce, whose indignation had given place to the most profonnd melancholy, "to whom would you promise happiness? Alás! I have none; I can diffuse around me nothing but sorrow."—"If you, also, refuse this prayer," said Madame de Vernon, your severity will be too great for me; "yes, too great indeed."—I felt her sinking in my arms, I hastened to place her on the sofa.

Delphine, animated by a generous emotion, which elevated her even above her love for Leonce, then approached to Madame de Vernon, and said to her, in a solemn voice, and accent of inspiration: "It is indeed too much; and this cruel Leonce, insensible to our prayers, is not the interpreter of Heaven's justice to you. I take you under my protection; if he injures you, to me the offence will be given; if he do not pronounce at your feet, words calculated to calm your soul, from my heart

heart he shall be alienated. You ask him to respect the happiness of your daughter, I will answer for her happiness: this I swear to her expiring mother; and if Leonce wishes to preserve my esteem, and that recollection of love which is still dear to us, in the midst of our sorrows, he will never disturb the peace of Matilda, he will never diminish the respect she owes to the memory of her parent. O unfortunate Sophia! though Leonce has filled your heart with anguish, I pledge myself for the accomplishment of your wishes. Listen to me, I beg of you; listen only to me."—"Yes, I hear you," said Madame de Vernon, in a voice scarcely audible, "I hear you, Delphine, and I bless you: the benediction of the dying is always holy; receive it; come near me . . ."—She then laid her head on Delphine's shoulder.

On seeing this, Leonce fell on his knees before Madame de Vernon, and exclaimed, "Yes, I am too cruel: Oh! Delphine is an angel; pardon me, that she may pardon me

me also: pardon me the evil I have done you." "Do you hear, Sophia," said Madame d'Albemar to Madame de Vernon, who made no reply to Leonce—"do you hear? he is no longer unjust; he is reconciled to you." "Yes," said Leonce, "he is reconciled to you, but perhaps he is himself about to die." The fatigue of his long journey in the middle of winter, without any repose, and the agitation he had experienced affected him so much, that he fell senseless before us.

Judge of my alarm—think what were the feelings of Delphine. Madame de Vernon's hands, already cold with death, grasped hers, and she could not stir from the spot, though Leonce was near her, stretched seemingly lifeless on the floor. Madame de Vernon, in the midst of her last convulsions, pressed once more the hand of Delphine, and expired. Delphine, in a state which it is impossible to describe, supported the body of her friend in her arms, and, with her eyes fixed on Leonce,

repe tedly

repeatedly called to me thus—"Madame de Lebensei, just Heaven!—Does he still live? Tell me, does he live?" My cries soon brought Madame de Mondoville to the room. Her mother no longer lived, and her husband, whom she believed to be in Spain, lay motionless before her. She imagined that his grief for the death of her mother had thrown him into this state; and, much affected at finding him so indisposed, she displayed a presence of mind which rendered her really interesting.

Leonce was removed to another chamber: Delphine remained during the whole of this time immoveable, and plunged into a deep reverie. Her friend, who was no more, still rested on her bosom; and she, as it were, asked me with her eyes, what I thought of the situation of Leonce? I assured her, that he would soon recover, and that the emotions he felt, added to the fatigue he had sustained, were the only causes of the accident which had befallen him. At this moment Madame de Mondoville entered

tered with her priests, and all the apparatus of death. Delphine, who now perceived that Madame de Vernon had ceased to live, gently placed on her bed this woman at once interesting and criminal. She then knelt, and kissed her hand with affection and respect: after which, we left the room, and she allowed me to conduct her back to her own house, but spoke not a word.

As I found that she was threatened with a very high fever, I caused her to be put to bed. We sent several times to inquire after Leonce; and we learned that, though he recovered from the swoon, he was still unwell, but not in any danger. M. Barton, who by a fortunate accident arrived yesterday evening, came to see Delphine this morning. She was so agitated, that it would not have been prudent to have allowed her to converse with him. He only told me, that having obtained Madame d'Albemar's promise not to write to Leonce, lest he should be irritated against his mother-in-law, he had however thought it right

to say a few words, to calm him, in a letter which he sent to Spain; but the obscurity of that letter, and the silence of Delphine, produced so much anxiety in Leonce's mind, that he left Spain immediately, hoping to arrive at Paris before the departure of Madame d'Albemar for Languedoc.

M. Barton has not concealed from me his uneasiness respecting the resolutions of Leonce. He receives the attention of Madame de Mondoville with kindness; but when he is alone with M. Barton, he appears invariably determined to pass his life with Madame d'Albemar. His passion for her has now increased to such a height, that it seems impossible to restrain it. M. Barton has no hope but in the courage and virtue of Madame d'Albemar. It is his opinion that she ought to refuse to see Leonce, and put in execution her plan of returning to you. This, I doubt not, is also the determination of Delphine, for I have

have heard her repeat, in a low voice, when she has supposed herself alone—*No, I ought not to see him again; I love him too much; he also loves me: no, it must not be: we must part.*

What, however, must become of Leonce and Delphine? With their sentiments, and their situation, how can they exist either separate or together? My husband is come here, and he has restored the courage which had abandoned me. He says he will try to offer some consolation to Madame d'Albemar: but what good can be expected to be done even by him, though he is one of the most ingenious of mankind? Your perfect friendship, Madam, may discover consolations which I seek for in vain. I am convinced of the energy of Madame d'Albemar's character, and the severity of her principles; but this, alas! is certain, that there is no resolution, which can henceforth reconcile her happiness and her duty.

Accept,

Accept, Mademoiselle, the homage of my respect and regard for you.

ELIZA DE LEBENSIE.

END OF VOL. II.

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